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MILLICENT AND HER COUSINS

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'Mrs. Russell and Milly.'—*Page* 61,

MILLICENT AND HER COUSINS.

BY

THE HON. AUGUSTA BETHELL,

AUTHOR OF 'HELEN IN SWITZERLAND,' 'ECHOES OF AN OLD BELL,' ETC.

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TO

Ethel and Violet.

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MILLICENT

AND HER COUSINS.

CHAPTER I.

MILLY AND HER GOVERNESS.

'"THE first express mention of soap occurs in Pliny." Oh, Miss Horne, *must* I learn such uninteresting stuff?' exclaimed a bright-haired, rosy-cheeked girl, some ten or eleven years of age.

'My dear,' replied a staid, sad-looking lady, 'you call everything that is useful "uninteresting stuff;" in this instance, Millicent, as in others, I must beg to differ from you. Surely you must like to know the origin of things that you see and use every day? Can you tell me of what substances soap is composed?'

'Oh dear,' sighed Millicent, 'what can it matter? It's soap, and it cleans one, whatever it's made of. However, this stupid old book says the Gauls used to make it of tallow and ashes, and that we make it of lixious—whatever that may mean—salts and tallow.'

'Lixious,' began Miss Horne, 'means—'

'Oh, there's Herbert, I declare,' interrupted the inattentive Millicent, throwing down her book. 'Wait one moment, please, Miss Horne;' and before her governess could make any remonstrance she had jumped up and bounded out of the open window to meet her brother, who was coming slowly towards the house.

'What *is* the matter, Milly?' he asked, as she rushed up to him and caught hold of his arm. 'Is the house on fire, or—'

'No, no, you dear old stupid,' laughed Milly; 'don't you see it's only because I'm so pleased you've come home? You've been away ever since yesterday morning, remember; that's a long time. And now do let me come with you, walking or riding, or something.'

'And how about the lessons, Milly?' asked her brother as he kissed her. 'Are they all finished for the day, eh?'

The girl coloured, and, heaving a deep sigh, said, 'No, Herbert, I can't say that they are; but (brightening up) if you will only ask Miss Horne, I'm sure she will let me off the rest of them to-day.'

'But I am very sure I shall not make any such request, Milly. Come, be a sensible little girl, finish your lessons properly, and then I'll do anything you like.'

Milly made no reply; she seldom attempted to argue with her brother, whatever she might do with other people; and now she followed him with a subdued air back into the schoolroom, where Miss Horne was patiently waiting her reappearance.

'I've brought back the truant, Miss Horne,' said Mr. Grant, smiling, as he wished her good morning. 'She quite understands that all the lessons are to be finished before I can have anything to say to her.'

'Oh, thank you, Mr. Grant,' replied the governess, with a sigh. 'Millicent is really so wild I don't know what to do with her.'

'Well, well,' said Herbert as he made his escape from Milly's pleading eyes and Miss Horne's piteous tones, 'we must tame her by degrees; and I daresay we shall make something of our little savage in time.'

Millicent Grant's parents were in India, and at the time our story opens she herself had only been about six months in England. Her father was in the army. He had twice married, nearly twenty years having elapsed between the death of his first wife—Herbert's mother—and his second marriage. Herbert and Milly were therefore only half-brother and sister; and Colonel Grant's second marriage having taken place in India, Herbert had never seen his little sister until she was sent to England to be educated. Mrs. Grant had first proposed sending her to school; but to this Herbert would not listen, and he insisted on being allowed to make a home for the little maiden, although there were not wanting those who laughed at him for his pains, as well as at the idea of his undertaking such a charge at his age. But to Herbert the idea of a merry little girl running about his old house, and brightening it, was a peculiarly pleasant one; so he let his friends laugh on, and was soon busily employed in making active preparations for Milly's arrival. Mrs. Grant had begged him to engage a governess, and hoped he would be careful to find a staid, steady person; for Milly was inclined to be somewhat wild, and would require a firm hand over her. With this caution in his mind, and aided in his selection by the advice of his nearest neighbour and cousin, Mrs. Marsh, Herbert made choice of Miss Horne, out of fifty or more applicants who

answered his advertisement. But the choice was scarcely a judicious one. Miss Horne was undoubtedly staid and steady, and probably firm enough where her own will was never disputed; but she was not the kind of person to cope with the spoiled, wilful Milly Grant, as Herbert was forced to admit before they had been a month together. Milly was devoted to her brother, and he dearly loved his little self-inflicted plague; but there were times when he was sorely puzzled how to act for the best, and when the repeated mutual complaints of governess and pupil became very irksome to him. He himself rarely had any trouble with Milly; but no amount of petting or scolding could ensure her good behaviour when away from him. Certainly she was not the docile, gentle little being that he had told himself would be so pleasant to have living with him; she differed sadly from Lilly and Georgie Marsh, whom he had never seen but on their best behaviour, either sitting with demure faces working at small coloured crotchet mats in their mamma's drawing-room, or parading gravely and sedately on the common with their governess.

Wild, impulsive, warm-hearted Millicent was of a totally different nature, and, sad to say, she refused to take pattern by, or in any way to tolerate, these model young ladies.

'Little stuck-up creatures,' she called them, curling up her diminutive nose, when Herbert, having taken her to pay a formal visit at Combe, and much shocked at her behaviour there, was gravely trying to remonstrate with her, and to hold them up as examples. 'I don't like them one bit, with their little puggy bits of wool, and prim ways. Mamma and papa never scolded me at home for running about or laughing, or "being wild" as Miss Horne calls it, and why should you all want to alter me? Oh, dear

mammy, I wish you were here!' and then, as was always the case at the remembrance of her mother, her eyes would overflow with tears; and Herbert would soon forget his lecture in trying to console her, and her smiles being as ready to break out as her tears, this was no hard task. If easily vexed, it must be allowed that Milly was also easily pleased; her interest was very quickly awakened, for she was totally different to most Indian children; there was nothing languid or torpid about her, her every movement was full of life,—too much so to please poor Miss Horne, whose shattered nerves suffered keenly every time the door opened and shut with a loud report, or a pile of books was dashed from the table to the ground. On each occasion Milly was profuse in her apologies; but, somehow or other, the same thing invariably happened again, and poor Miss Horne did little else but give violent starts and violent sighs all the day long.

It was with anything but a good grace that Milly resigned herself to her fate on the afternoon on which our story opens.

As soon as her brother had closed the door, she shut up her lesson-book, and threw it across the table, exclaiming, '"What! no soap? So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber!" I shan't learn any more of that stuff to-day.'

'Millicent, how can you be so naughty! Pray, be sensible, and fetch your book again.'

'Oh no, not that one. I'll read a chapter of English history if you like; that will do just as well.'

'Begin then, my dear.'

'Come along, then, Mrs. Markham. I say, Miss Horne, don't you wish that I was like one of those good little

children who ask all these nice questions at the end of each chapter,—Fanny, for instance?'

'Indeed I do, Milly; and you could do so if you chose. Shall we try to-day, my love?'

'No, thank you,' said Milly, making a little face expressive of disgust; and, opening the book at random, she began to read, or rather to gabble in a disjointed manner, regardless of stops or expression, until Miss Horne, thoroughly wearied out with stopping her at every other word, at length gave her leave to shut the book, and to put away her lessons for the afternoon, a command promptly obeyed by Millicent, who gathered up her books, threw them carelessly into a cupboard, and then scampered out of the room, calling out 'Herbert! Herbert!' at the top of her voice, as she raced down the long corridor which separated the schoolroom from the other part of the house.

CHAPTER II.

JOE'S HALF-CROWN.

'SHALL we have a ride to-day, Milly?' asked her brother next morning, when she came to him as usual after the schoolroom breakfast.

'Oh yes! What time shall I be ready, Herbert?'

'About five, it will be nice and cool then.'

At the time appointed Milly appeared ready dressed for her ride, and springing with one bound into the saddle, she gave her pony a smart cut with her whip, which sent him flying half way up the avenue before her brother had even mounted. He soon overtook her, however, and they rode on together, Milly's tongue keeping pace with her pony's feet.

'Herbert, who lived at Fairfield before you?'

'Uncle Frank, of course.'

'Was he papa's brother?'

'Yes.'

'Why didn't he leave the place to him instead of to you?'

'He looked upon me almost as a son, for I was nearly always with him, papa being so much away. You know my mother died when I was only four years old, and my father was very little in England afterwards.'

'Is it a very old house?'

'Yes, Milly, very old indeed. Part of it is as old as the time of King Stephen. I daresay you can tell me when that was?'

'Oh, don't ask me any bothering dates, please,' entreated Milly. 'I want to know about the house; hasn't it got a ghost story?'

'Not a regular one,' said Herbert; 'and I certainly never saw anything.'

'Ah! but Jane has,' said Milly, eagerly. 'I heard her telling Mary all about it.'

'Nonsense, Milly; you shouldn't listen to such rubbish; and Jane ought to know better than to say anything of the kind before you.'

'She thought I was asleep. Don't scold her; she didn't know I was listening.'

'Then how could you do so, Milly, if you knew you ought not?'

'Well,' said Millicent, colouring up, 'I daresay it was wrong; but I didn't think of it at first; and then it was such fun hearing all about the ghost.'

'What did they say?'

'Jane began, "I say, Mary, I'm all of a tremble; I've seen the ghostess." "No!" said Mary; "have you though? Oh, lawks, Jane, whatever is she like now?" "Well," said Jane, "I didn't quite see her, I only heard her a-coming behind me down the long passage, when my candle went out. There was a rustling and a jingling, and my heart went pit-a-pat so, I almost choked. Just as I came near the nursery door I gave one look round, saw something white, and rushed in here all of a quiver like a jelly."'

Herbert could not help laughing at the little mimic. 'And what next?' he asked.

'Oh, then they began talking about a Lady Albertine who used to live here; and then I suppose I went to sleep, for I don't remember any more. Do tell me about her, Herbert.'

'About Albertine?'

'Yes; who was she?'

'An ancestress of ours who lived here once, and who was very unhappy, I believe.'

'But why? Do tell me.'

'Well, she had lived in France nearly all her life, and was very fond of everything gay and lively. Out there she married one Adam Grant, a gaunt, rugged Scotchman, who, although he had really a very kind heart, was rough in his manners, and very intolerant of what he called "fid-fad fancies." He saved Lady Albertine's life on one occasion, and, knowing that he loved her, the warm-hearted, impulsive girl thought in her gratitude that she could not do less than marry him. Adam took her to Scotland, at which she was delighted, for she was warmly attached to Mary, Queen of Scots, whom she had known at the French court, and who at that time had just married Darnley. Lady Albertine spent a great deal of her time with the young queen; but her husband soon became very jealous, and, being a rigid Puritan, disapproved of the intimacy. So, one day, he told his wife that he had made up his mind to leave Scotland altogether, and to live at his place in England. Poor Albertine begged and implored him not to separate her from the queen; but he refused to listen to her entreaties, and in a very short time they had left Scotland and were settled at Fairfield. Albertine had never been in England before, and, first seen in the midst of fogs in the month of November, it seemed dreary enough to her. She used to

wander up and down the long passages at Fairfield, restless and miserable, taking no interest in any man, woman, or child about the place, only wearying for the time when she should again see her beloved queen. Her husband became more gloomy than ever, and rarely spoke a kind word to her. One by one her French servants were either sent away or went away of their own accord, so that she was left almost alone, for she rarely spoke to the ignorant, countrified creatures who succeeded them. At last her husband lost all patience, and one day so far forgot himself as to strike her in his anger. After this she tried to run away, but was soon overtaken, brought back, and confined to one part of the house. In the end she fretted herself to death, and foolish ignorant people have always declared that her spirit haunts the long corridors, and that she may be seen there any night about twelve o'clock, walking up and down, trailing her long black velvet dress after her.'

'Thank you, Herbert,' said Milly. 'Don't be frightened, they won't make me believe in a ghost. Poor Lady Albertine must have had enough of the long passage in her lifetime, to want to walk in it now, I should think! What a sad story! Have you anything belonging to her?'

'Yes, some old brocaded dresses in the chest in the oak-room. You may look at them some day.'

'Oh yes, I should like it of all things. Some wet day I shall remind you of your promise. Don't you know anything more about Lady Albertine, or any other ghost story?'

'I've told you all I know about Lady Albertine; and I don't think— Oh yes, of course! I've just remembered a splendid ghost story for you, Milly, one which happened to me, too.'

'Oh, how delicious! Why didn't you tell me before? Now then, Herbert, please begin.'

'Well, then, once upon a time, ever so many years ago, when I was about sixteen, I was invited by a school-fellow, a great chum of mine, to go home with him one Saturday, to stay till the following Monday. He had very often described the old house he lived in, and I was very anxious to see it, and delighted to go.

'Well, we arrived, and his mother was very kind and glad to see me, and, after luncheon, told her son to show me my room, saying, at the same time, "You won't, I hope, mind being in rather an out-of-the-way part of the house, Mr. Grant; but some fresh visitors having unexpectedly come to-day, I have no other room to offer you."

'"Which is it?" asked my friend.

'"The clock-room, dear,—you know," replied his mother.

'"Oh! the haunted chamber. All right; come along, Grant."

'"Nonsense," said his mother, laughing, but at the same time looking slightly uncomfortable. "The room has been so called, I believe; but I don't think you need be alarmed, Mr. Grant."

'"Alarmed! I only wish it really were haunted; I should like nothing better," I hastened to say, full of daylight courage, as I followed Lindsay to the room in question. You think Fairfield a large house, Milly, and so it is; but Clevedown was about three times the size. I thought we never should reach our destination, as Lindsay led me first down one passage, then another; and as to ever finding my way back again, that I quite despaired of doing.

'"It's a fearful grind from my part of the house," he said; "but I 'm glad they've put you in this room for one thing: we can have a jolly smoke this evening, and no one will be

a bit the wiser;" for, I am sorry to say, we had just begun to learn the delights of a forbidden cigar, and Mr. Lindsay, as was not unnatural, thought his son full young to indulge in such bad habits.

'"That will be first-rate," I answered; "and as to being haunted,—you won't get me to believe such rubbish. What sort of a ghost is it—man, woman, or child?"

'"Oh no," said Lindsay, laughing, "it's a cow! The only ghost of the kind I ever heard of."

'"But has it really ever been seen?" I asked.

'"So they say; but I don't believe a word of it. Come along now, let's go down to the river."

'So away we went, and I forgot all about the ghost for the rest of the day. The dinner-hour was half-past seven; we stayed out so late that we had only about five minutes to dress in, and managed to slip quietly into our places just as the soup was finished. About eleven o'clock Lindsay came up to me, and said in a low voice—

'"I say, I've had enough of all this squalling and howling (he meant the singing that was going on); let's sneak off to your room and have a pipe."

'I agreed, nothing loth; and for nearly an hour we sat laughing, talking, and smoking, fancying, no doubt, that we were enjoying ourselves very much. Lindsay, however, never ventured on a second cigar or pipe, as the case might be; and a few minutes before twelve he got up, saying he must be off, wished me good-night and no ghosts, and went off to his own room. I should tell you that the room I was in derived its name from the fact of an old clock having been built into the wall, its face looking out on to the court-yard. I took out my watch to wind it up. "Close on twelve, I declare; I suppose the old clock will tune up directly.

I hope—" But my meditations were cut short by an extraordinary sound which seemed to come out of the wall, and which, there could be no doubt, was nothing else than the *mooing* of a cow! The clock began to strike very slowly, and the noise went on, gradually growing louder and louder with each stroke, and only ceased when the last had sounded.'

'Oh, Herbert,' interrupted Milly, 'how horrible! weren't you frightened?'

'I should just think I was. A haunted room might be very pleasant to talk about in broad daylight; but it was not so pleasant to find yourself in it at midnight, with the ghost on the point of appearing. For some time I stood where I was, with my watch in my hand, not daring to move, my teeth chattering, and in what schoolboys would call "a regular funk." There was nothing, however, to be seen, and no ghost appeared in the shape of a cow, the mooing was not repeated, and at length I recovered from my panic and got into bed.'

'And didn't you pull the clothes well over your head?' asked Milly.

'Don't ask impertinent questions, Miss. I daresay I did; except that I remember that it was a very hot night, and I could hardly have borne them. Well, I lay awake for some time, thinking of all the horrible stories I had ever heard, when suddenly the mooing began again, and the clock struck one. Then all was silent, and I buried my head deeper in the pillow, and wished I had never come near Lindsay's ghostly old home. However, the noise was not repeated, and at length I fell asleep; and when I awoke it was broad daylight, and the sun was streaming into my room. "Nothing shall tempt me to sleep here another

night," I thought to myself. "I'll make some excuse and go off this afternoon. Lindsay may chaff me as much as he likes; I've had enough of this cow ghost." At that moment the mysterious noise began afresh, as the clock commenced striking the hour of six. But the same sounds may be heard in the dead of night and in broad daylight with very different feelings, and suddenly the true solution of the mystery flashed across my mind. The noise only came when the clock struck, and the length of time it lasted exactly corresponded with the hour. Of course, then, it had something to do with the clock. I was more and more convinced of this when seven struck, and the mooing again began; but there being other noises abroad by this time, it was not so noticeable as before. After breakfast Mrs. Lindsay asked me, in a half joking, half serious way, whether I had heard or seen anything. I told her what had occurred, and she said that every one who had ever slept in that room had heard the same noise. She thought with me that it might proceed from the clock, and promised to have the matter looked into; and, to make a long story short, it was discovered that the *mooing* was caused by some weight running down to assist the poor feeble old clock to strike the hours. It certainly was an extraordinary noise, exactly similar to that made by a cow. Mrs. Lindsay was quite relieved to have the mystery explained. I very often went there afterwards, but never chanced to sleep in that room again. So there, you have my ghost story, Milly; and I daresay many others might be explained as easily.'

Milly was about to answer, when her attention was diverted by the sight of a little boy sitting under a hedge, crying bitterly.

'Oh, what can be the matter with that poor little boy?'

she called out. 'Do let us stop a moment and ask, Herbert, please.'

They did so, and, after sundry questions on the part of both, the boy was induced to look up and tell his tale. This took some little time to understand, his sobs being as plentiful as his words. At length they made out that his name was Joe Dickson, and that he lived as farm-boy at Combe, a village about three miles from Fairfield. His mother was a widow, living in the Grants' parish, a poor woman, with no other support than 1s. 6d. a week and two loaves from the parish, on which miserable allowance she and an imbecile daughter lived, or rather starved. Little Joe was a good son, and every penny of his small earnings, after finding his own clothes, went to his mother. On the preceding day he had had the good fortune to have half a crown given him for holding the horse of a gentleman who had come to see his employer on business. There chanced to be another boy standing by, an ill-tempered, surly lad, who also worked for Farmer Palmer, and who was always trying to pick quarrels with poor little Joe. He saw the gift, and, enraged at Joe's good luck, began to abuse him, calling him a sneak and other names, and threatening to knock him down unless he shared the money with him.

'And did you?' asked Milly, becoming intensely interested at this point of the story.

'No, miss; 'arf a crown 'ood help pay mother's rent, and I knowed Ned 'ood only have spent his share on suckabobs. 'Sides I arned it. So I telled Ned he shouldn't have a penn'orth of the 'arf-crown. "So," says he, "take care I don't have the whole." Then I went and axed the master if I might take the money to mother this afternoon, and he says "Yes, Joe, you may."'

'Well, and did Ned get hold of it, then?' asked Herbert, thinking the story was likely to last a long time.

'No, not then; but I knows he has now,' said the boy, bursting out crying afresh. 'I put it in my trousers pocket; and for fear Ned should steal it, as he sleeps along of me, I put my trousers under my head at night. Next mornin' I didn't like to look and see before him; but I guv it a shake, and felt it jump right enuff; and all the mornin' I was at work along with Ned, and all the time I was athinking and athinking how pleased mother 'ood be with the money. After dinner I set off, and Ned he came with me part of the way; when he turned back and was safe out of sight, I put my hand in my pocket to look at my 'arf-crown, and (sob, sob, sob) only found this,' holding out a very greasy penny.

Milly was puzzled. 'But how did the half-crown get changed into a penny?'

'That sneak Ned must have changed it last night; I s'pose I slept sound,' burst out the boy; 'and now mother'll go without.'

Milly felt very sorry for him; but at the same time despised him for his tears and evident cowardice; so she said, 'Why, you are not half a boy! Why didn't you run back directly you found it out, and make Ned give you back the money? He has only taken it to tease you.'

Joe looked down, shuffled his feet together, and rubbing his eye with a very dirty finger, drawled out, 'He's arf as big again as me.'

Milly looked and felt still more contemptuous at the answer, and said, 'Well, it was no good crying.'

'No, miss, it warn't.'

'Come, take my advice, my boy,' said Herbert; 'go

back to the farm now, and when you see Ned, ask him quietly for your half-crown; and if he gives it you up, as he is almost sure to do, take it, and if you haven't pluck enough to knock him down, hold your tongue; if, however, he won't give it up, you must either fight for it or put up with the loss, unless you like to tell Farmer Palmer.'

'No,' said Joe; 'I'd not like to do that.'

'No, so I should fancy. Well, I'll tell you what I will do for you, Joe; I'll send your mother half a crown to-night, and you can repay me when you get yours, or another again.'

Joe's eyes brightened; but all he could get out was, 'Thank ye, sir; to-morrow's mother's rent-day, and she'll be glad of it, I know.'

'Very well, then, that's settled. Now, Milly, we must be going. Goodbye Joe; don't sit there any longer.'

They rode home rather quickly, for Herbert was engaged out to dinner, and there was no time to lose, as it was already very late.

CHAPTER III.

MILLY REBELS.

MILLY threw off her habit hastily, leaving it an untidy heap on the floor, and was soon in the schoolroom, telling Miss Horne about Joe Dickson and the half-crown.

'Miss Horne, may we go to Mrs. Dickson's to-morrow, as we walk out?'

'I don't know about that, Millicent. I must ask Mr. Grant first.'

'But why? He always lets me go into any cottage I like.'

'Well, I have my reasons, my dear. I heard something to-day which I must tell him before I take you.'

'What have you heard? is it anything to make a mystery about? Can't you tell me?' asked Milly, impatiently.

'No, my dear, I think it will be better not to do so. Never mind, finish your tea;' and Miss Horne, taking some knitting from her pocket, leant back in her chair and began to work.

Milly pushed her plate and cup from her, upsetting the latter as she did so.

'I don't want any more tea,' she said, pouting. 'I suppose I may go and see my rabbits before bed-time.'

'Yes, my love, certainly; but come in before it gets damp.'

'Damp!' repeated Milly to herself, contemptuously, as she ran off. 'Damp! this lovely summer's evening! It seems to me that governesses always look on the gloomy side, even when there isn't one. Why can't they be happy and merry, I wonder?'

Poor Miss Horne! Had Milly but known half her troubles, her wonder would soon have ceased; but I think that, in its place, she would have felt surprise that her governess could wear the placid contented face she did. It was a pity that Miss Horne did not work more on her pupil's feelings, instead of shutting herself up in her shell of reserve; for Milly's warm heart would have been the first to sympathize with her, and it would have done her no harm to have heard some of her governess's troubles, although she could not have told the little girl all. How little did Milly know the painful thoughts passing through Miss Horne's mind, when to all appearance she was entirely engrossed with that 'eternal knitting!'

How startled would she not have been, could she have beheld the scene pictured in Miss Horne's mind as she sat and worked! It was that of a cold, bare, dismal room, in a dingy, narrow London street. In the morning it contained only two figures; an old woman scantily clothed, sitting on a hard, frayed horsehair arm-chair, plaiting straw with feeble, trembling fingers, every now and then lifting her sightless eyes to the window, where, seated at a table, so as to catch every ray of light, was a young girl engaged in drawing. In the evening, still looking at the same picture, another figure was added to it, that of a man between thirty and forty years of age, whose coming in for a while brightened

up the dull, dreary room. For one half-hour the two women ceased working; it was the one solitary pleasure of the day, this visit of the son and uncle to his mother and niece, and they always enjoyed it to the utmost. Still knitting away, Miss Horne could fancy she heard all they said; could fancy she heard her pretty Mary reading Aunt Agatha's last letter; could fancy she heard her dear old mother saying, as she knew she did say every day of her life, 'God bless her, my good dear child!'

. . . . . .

But of all this Milly knew nothing, nor of the life of self-denial her governess had led ever since her childhood, in order to send home weekly some of her hard-earned savings.

It would have been a comfort to Agatha Horne to have talked of those dear to her, even to a child; but she never did so; it was too sad a subject, she thought, for Milly's age and nature. In this she was mistaken; but, like many good and even clever women who undertake the charge of children, she failed to understand the disposition of the child she taught.

It is time now to return to Milly, who, as we have seen, went off to her rabbits in a high state of dudgeon.

'How ridiculous Miss Horne is,' she thought, 'not to tell me her reason for not going to Mrs. Dickson's to-morrow! I hate mysteries. By-the-bye,' as the idea suddenly occurred to her, 'I wonder whether Herbert told any one to take that half-crown to Joe's mother! He went off in such a hurry I daresay he forgot all about it;' and throwing down the lettuces and other green food she had gathered for her rabbits, she started off to the house to make inquiries. The groom, stable-boy, and butler were first asked. No, Mr. Herbert had given no orders of the

kind to either of them; then Milly inquired indoors, but no one knew anything about the matter; and at last she felt convinced that Herbert had, in his hurry, allowed it to slip his memory. 'Oh dear! oh dear! what can be done?' thought poor Milly, almost in tears. 'Herbert promised to send the money, and to-morrow is rent-day, and perhaps Mrs. Dickson hasn't enough money to pay it. I must ask Miss Horne if one of the maids may take it down to her.'

Away went Milly full tilt to the schoolroom, and opening the door so sharply and suddenly that Miss Horne awoke from her daydreams with a start that ran the knitting pins into her hand, she exclaimed, almost breathless—

'Oh, Miss Horne, I've just found out that Herbert forgot to send Mrs. Dickson the half-crown. He promised to send it to-night; so, may one of the maids take it at once?'

'Certainly not, Milly. It will do in the morning equally as well.'

'It won't,' called out Millicent. 'To-morrow is rent-day, and Joe wanted his mother to have it to-night, that she might not lie awake all night thinking of her rent. Oh, Miss Horne, please let some one take it; do!'

'I am very sorry, my dear; but I have particular reasons for refusing you. I know they are right, Milly; do try and trust me, child.'

'Tell me them, then; why can't you?'

'I think it is better not to do so; and you ought to be satisfied when I say this.'

Milly now lost all patience, and stamped her foot on the floor. 'I'm not satisfied; and its very unkind of you not to let poor Mrs. Dickson have the money. Besides, Herbert made a promise, and a promise should never be broken.'

'I know that, Milly; but in this case I fear it must be broken, for I most certainly cannot send the money to-night. Now, run away to your rabbits; there's a good child. I am very sorry to disappoint you, but it is unavoidable.'

Milly had a determined will. She saw it was useless arguing with Miss Horne any longer; but as she left the room her spirit rebelled, and she was resolved to defy her governess. Retracing her steps slowly to the rabbit-hutch, she pondered on the manner in which she could effect her purpose. 'I won't send any of the servants,' she thought, 'because it would get them into trouble. I'm sure Jane would go in a minute if I asked her; but I won't do that. I know, though, what I'll do; I'll go myself. Yes; why shouldn't I? It's only at the other end of the village. I could run there and back in no time. I've got half a crown, too; that's lucky. I'll run and fetch it.' But she was no sooner inside the house than she was met by Jane, and told that Miss Horne wished her to go to bed at once. 'What for, Jane?' burst out Milly; 'it is only just eight o'clock, and I always sit up till half-past eight.' Jane, however, could only repeat Miss Horne's orders, and the indignant Milly, now more than ever rebellious, was marched off to her bedroom. Her purpose was, nevertheless, not one whit altered. She undressed and went to bed in silence, intending all the time to get up again as soon as her maid had gone down to supper. 'It is a beautiful night,' she said to herself, 'and I am determined to go. Miss Horne shan't tyrannize over me like this. Poor Mrs. Dickson! I daresay she's crying now about the money for her rent; how pleased she'll be! I shall just run in, pop it on the table, and say, "Joe sent this, Mrs. Dickson," and then run out again. I daresay she'll take me for a fairy; what fun!

Herbert is sure not to be home till eleven; of course I shall tell him to-morrow, but I would rather he didn't know it to-night. Oh dear! Why doesn't Jane go down stairs?' Apparently Jane was not hungry that evening, or she had some work she wished to finish, for she sat in the adjoining nursery long after the supper-bell had rung, and Milly, in her impatience, thought she would never go. At last she folded up her work and left the room; and no sooner had the door shut behind her, than Milly started up and began to dress as fast as possible. She put on her cloak and hat, and opened the door of the outer nursery very softly. There was no one to be seen, and tripping lightly along the passage, and down the wide oak staircase, she was soon at the hall door. This she had only to unlock, the heavy bolts not having been drawn for the night, in consequence of Mr. Grant's absence. 'I must make haste,' thought Milly, 'or I may be locked out all night;' and once outside, she ran quickly down the carriage-drive and into the village. Here she thought it best to walk, as there were people about, whose attention might be attracted if she ran; so, trying to look and feel very unconcerned, she walked on towards Mrs. Dickson's cottage, and, on arriving, was rejoiced to see a light shining through the window. 'I shan't have to wait long, then,' she thought, as she rapped at the door, which was quickly opened by Mrs. Dickson, who started back in surprise at sight of the child. Milly began speaking very fast. 'Oh, Mrs. Dickson, we found your son Joe crying under a hedge to-day, and he told us it was because he wanted to bring you a half a crown towards your rent to-morrow, and some other boy took it from him, and so he couldn't; and then Herbert—my brother, you know—said he would send you another to-night;

but he went out to dinner and forgot, and so I've come down with it, and here it is.' Milly stopped, breathless, and held out the money to Mrs. Dickson, who stood staring at her, holding her candle very much on one side, letting the tallow drop all about.

'Lawks, Miss, whatever be it about?' she said at last.

Milly was obliged to repeat her story before it was understood.

Then Mrs. Dickson began, 'Lawks, Miss, did you ever, now! Bless my little Joe's heart; but he's a good 'un to his old mother, he be! And thank you kindly too, Miss. Lawks, and if I hadn't forgotten as how it's rent-day to-morrow! But there; I be so put about with my gal's illness, I can't think of nothing else. Will you step in, please, Miss?'

'No, thank you,' said Milly; 'I must go home. Did you say your daughter was ill? what is the matter with her?'

'Well, they do say as how it's scarlatina; and she be terrible bad, sure enuff. I've been a-wishing for the doctor to come all day long, I have; and when I heard you knock, I hoped it might be he.'

'Scarlatina!' exclaimed Milly, drawing back, and in an instant it flashed across her mind that this was why Miss Horne had not wished to send any of the servants to the cottage. 'Is she very ill?'

'Yes, that she be; I don't know how I shall get through the night with her.'

'Where does the doctor live? Can't you send for him?'

'Them parish doctors don't care for poor people's sendings, bless you, Miss. Maybe he wouldn't come.'

'Oh yes, I'm sure he would; how far off is it, Mrs. Dickson?'

'Milly in search of the Doctor.'—*Page* 25.

'Bout half a mile down the road.'

'The white cottage which stands by itself?'

'Yes, that's the one,' said Mrs. Dickson, and almost before she had finished speaking Milly had started off, saying she would fetch Mr. Smith.

Away she ran, never giving a thought now to either her brother or Miss Horne; it was clearly right that the doctor should come, and as there was no one else to fetch him, why, she must do it.

The lane was overhung by trees, and was very dark; and although a courageous child, Milly's heart gave many a thump as she ran along: she had never before been out alone at night, and over and over again she wished herself safe at home and in bed, before the half mile was accomplished. It was past ten by the time she reached the doctor's house, and it was some time before any attention was paid to her numerous rings at the bell, for they were early people, and had all gone to bed. At length an upper window was opened, and a shrill voice asked who was there and what was wanted; and then Milly shouted out that Mrs. Dickson's daughter was very ill, and would be glad to see Mr. Smith as soon as possible. The shrill voice replied that Mr. Smith was in bed, and that folks shouldn't come troubling at that time of night. 'But I tell you she's very ill, and Mr. Smith *must* go,' called back Milly, not frightened but made bold by her indignation at the rebuff. Then she heard herself called 'a saucy minx,' and the owner of the shrill voice withdrew from the window for a moment or two, and spoke to some one in the room. Then she returned, and said, 'Tell Mrs. Dickson that Mr. Smith will come the first thing in the morning, and she must give her daughter some of the medicine he left for her. Now,

run away.' With this the window was sharply pulled down, and poor Milly felt utterly defeated; and her spirits sank as she thought of the dark lane through which she must retrace her steps alone, for in coming she had consoled herself with the idea that Mr. Smith would return with her. It began to rain, which increased her troubles; and having only put on a light garden jacket over her thin dress, she was soon quite wet through. She was very tired too, and the rain beating into her eyes made it very difficult for her to see the path. Several times she tripped and tumbled down, and was feeling altogether in a very bad plight, when suddenly she heard the sound of approaching wheels. The idea that her brother might be close at hand darted through her mind; she stood still, keeping close up to the hedge, and shouted out to the coachman to stop, as the carriage approached her. But the man was driving fast to escape the rain, which was coming down heavily then, and the noise made by the wheels entirely prevented him from hearing Milly's shouts. The carriage passed on rapidly. The poor little girl tried to run after it; but it was soon out of hearing, and she was left alone, cold, wet, tired, and frightened in the dark lane. 'Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do! I shall never get home, and they will all be so frightened,' cried the poor child in despair; but common sense told her it would do no good to sit down and cry; so calling up all her courage, on she struggled, her heart beating, her eyes blinded by the rain as well as by her tears, all kinds of undefined fears crowding on her mind, until at length the welcome lights of the village appeared in sight. Mrs. Dickson was standing at her open door talking to a man, to whom Milly ran up, crying out, 'Oh Barker, take me home! take me home!' It was the old butler, whom

Miss Horne had sent to make inquiries at Mrs. Dickson's for the missing child.

'Miss Milly! I was just coming after you. Bless my soul, how wet you are! Dear, dear, whatever will Mr. Herbert say? No, no, don't touch her, Mrs Dickson.'

'Oh, take me home; the doctor can't come to-night,' was all Milly could say; and lifting her in his arms, the old man almost ran with her up the village. Half way they were met by the carriage, in which Herbert was returning to look for her. Barker stopped it, and at the first sounds of his voice Mr. Grant jumped out, and lifting Milly in, told the coachman to drive back as fast as possible.

'Thank God,' he exclaimed, 'that you are safe!' Oh, Milly, how you have frightened us! Where have you been? You are wet through and through, and shivering all over, no wonder; and I've nothing to put round you.'

Then Milly, leaning her head on his shoulder, sobbed out her story, adding piteously, 'Oh, my head aches, and I'm so tired; don't scold me to-night, Herbert. I know it was very naughty of me.'

No, it clearly was not the time for scolding, Herbert saw that; he tried instead to soothe and quiet her by every means in his power, and by the time they arrived at home she was a little calmer. Almost before the carriage had stopped, the door opened, and out rushed Miss Horne and Jane, tearful and incoherent to the last degree. Mr. Grant cut short their flow of words by carrying Milly into the house, and telling Jane to follow him into the nursery. The little girl was quickly undressed and put into bed, and then Miss Horne brought up a glass of hot white wine whey, after drinking which she soon felt quite warm and comfortable. It was some time, however, before she could

go to sleep, as she was in a restless, excitable state. Miss Horne wished to sit up with her; but this Herbert would not allow, as he could see she was already quite worn out with the anxiety she had gone through in the child's absence. He gave her a short account of Milly's adventures, adding, that although he could not of course excuse the child's conduct, still he thought it would have been better to have told her why it was not desirable to send any one to the cottage, as she would at once have understood the reason. Poor Miss Horne acknowledged her mistake. She had been afraid, she said, of frightening Milly, and had not liked to mention the subject until she had first spoken to Mr. Grant. She had sent Milly to bed earlier than usual, the idea having occurred to her that she might be tempted to run down with the money herself; but once safe in bed, she had had no further fears on the subject. It was long past ten o'clock when Jane, frightened out of her senses, rushed into her (Miss Horne's) room, with the intelligence that Milly was not in bed and was nowhere to be found. Miss Horne at once sent the butler down to Mrs. Dickson's to see if she were there; and in the meantime she and Jane searched the house through for her, thinking she might perhaps have hidden herself in order to tease them.

'Well,' said Herbert, 'we must hope that the silly little thing will escape with nothing worse than a bad cold; but I am too anxious to leave her to-night, so I shall sit up in the outer nursery. And now, Miss Horne, I hope you will go to bed, for you look quite worn out. Good night. You shall have news of Milly directly you wake.'

CHAPTER IV.

LADY ALBERTINE.

AS might have been expected, the result of Milly's escapade was a violent cold and feverish attack, which kept her in bed for some days.

She was so thoroughly ashamed of her behaviour, that, at Mr. Grant's request, Miss Horne said very little on the subject. Her brother, however, talked to her seriously, and she was not slow to confess her fault, being well aware how wrong she had been to set her governess at defiance, and to act in a manner which a moment's thought would have told her must have been disapproved of by her brother.

'I didn't forget the matter, as you supposed, Milly,' Mr. Grant said to her; 'but as I was giving orders to Robert about the brougham after our ride, he asked me if I had heard that scarlatina had broken out in the village, and then he went on to say that Mrs. Dickson's daughter was ill with it. On hearing this, I thought it better to leave the half-crown till this morning, as I didn't like to send any one from the house with it. I forgot what a little busybody I left behind me.'

Milly coloured. 'I thought you would be so sorry to have forgotten your promise.'

'Ah! my child, another time don't trouble your head about other people's promises, be satisfied with keeping your own.'

In the afternoon Herbert told her that he had seen Mr. Smith, who pronounced the girl to be a great deal better. 'He was much surprised to hear this morning that it was you who came to his house last night, and said Mrs. Smith was afraid she had been very rude.'

'Horrid woman!' said Milly, indignantly; 'and he must be a horrid man too, to refuse to go out at night, only because it was to see a poor person.'

'You are judging too hastily, Milly; I don't think he is that sort of man at all. It seems he had gone to bed with a dreadful headache, and his wife did not choose to wake him. He was very much vexed to hear of what had passed.'

'But I heard Mrs. Smith talking to him inside the room,' said Milly, incredulously.

'No; you heard her speaking to some one; but it was to the servant, not to Mr. Smith.'

'She ought to have given him Mrs. Dickson's message, and let him decide for himself. Now, oughtn't she, Herbert?'

'Yes, of course; I am not defending her, but poor Mr. Smith, who really doesn't deserve blame. I daresay his wife will be wiser in future, thanks to your nocturnal visit, Milly!'

For some days Millicent was really very unwell; but, much to Miss Horne's relief, she showed no signs of having caught the scarlatina. The wetting she had had, however, produced a slight attack of rheumatism, which kept her confined to the house even after she was well enough to leave her bed-room.

Time hung very heavily on her hands, for she learnt very few lessons, and had no new story-books to read, or companions to play with. It was, therefore, quite an event to be told one day that little Joe Dickson was down stairs, and would like to see her.

Miss Horne, having first ascertained that he had not been to his mother's cottage, sent for him into the school-room, where Milly, seated in state in an arm-chair, was ready to receive her visitor. Joe was very shy, and stood close to the door shuffling his feet, and twirling his brimless hat round and round.

'Well, Joe,' said Milly, 'I hope your sister is getting better.'

'Yes, Miss; please Miss, I've come to thank you for giving mother the 'arf-crown.'

'Why, how did you hear anything about it?'

'I heerd tell as how you went down to mother's late at night and gave it her, and then went on for the doctor all alone in the dark,' and Joe's looks expressed the admiration and gratitude he was too shy to put into words.

'Oh, nonsense,' said Milly, colouring up; 'I was afraid my brother had forgotten—that was all. But tell me, Joe, how did you get on with Ned when you went back to the farm?'

'Ned was that 'shamed of hisself, Miss, that he didn't say much. When I axed him for the 'arf-crown, he chucked it at me with a grunt; and, please Miss,' went on Joe nervously, taking something out of his pocket in a great hurry, 'here it is,' and, coming forward a few steps, he held out the half-crown between his finger and thumb, adding, 'Please, Miss, will you take it? and thank you very much.'

'Oh, no,' said Milly; 'it was my own half-crown I gave

away, and I don't want it back;' but on noticing little Joe's look of distress, Miss Horne whispered to her that it would be better to take it, or his feelings might be hurt. Upon this Milly went towards him, and, with a sigh of relief, Joe dropped the money into her hand.

'Now go down, and have something to eat in the housekeeper's room,' said Miss Horne; but Joe still lingered, and seemed to have something more to say, which he was too shy to bring out. At last he made an effort, and plunging his hand into his pocket, produced a little white rabbit, with pink eyes and ears, which, with a great deal of stammering, he presented to Milly, who immediately went into perfect ecstasies over it.

'Is this for me? Oh, thank you, Joe; what a little darling! How kind of you! Don't you really want it?'

But Joe only shook his head, with a broad grin at her delight, then taking up his hat, shuffled out of the room as fast as he could. This visit, and the present she had received, gave Milly something to think about for the remainder of the day. If fine, she was to go out for the first time on the morrow; and she made Miss Horne promise that she might introduce the little stranger rabbit herself to his new companions, and amused herself by making up a grand speech to deliver on the occasion. The morrow, however, proved a pouring wet day, and Milly's little plans were in consequence frustrated.

In trying to think of some other amusement for her, Herbert suddenly remembered the old oak chest, which contained Lady Albertine's dresses, and a quantity of old rubbish besides.

'Oh, shouldn't I like to have a good rummage in it!' said Milly, her eyes sparkling with delight, when he re-

called the subject to her memory. 'May I, Herbert, after dinner?'

'Yes, to your heart's content; I will go and unlock it for you.'

What wonderful treasures did Milly not find in that old chest! The afternoon passed all too quickly for her, there were so many curiosities to look at besides Lady Albertine's old articles of dress.

Milly found it difficult to go to sleep that night; her imagination was hard at work weaving stories about all those who had lived at Fairfield in bygone days.

'What funny tales this old house could tell!' she thought; 'how I wish there was a talking chair or table! I should like to know more about poor Lady Albertine. What sweet little shoes those are of hers! they are not much too large for me; but then, I suppose, my feet are very big. I wish they had called me Albertine; it's a much prettier name than Millicent. I wish I could go to sleep; oh dear! I never shall, bed is so hot. I wonder if there really are such things as ghosts! I don't believe there are; but I should like to know. What fun it would be to see Lady Albertine glide into the oak chamber and dress herself in all her old things! Mary declares she does so every night, and she says she should die of fright if she saw her. I think it would be great fun. I wonder,' starting up, 'if she's there now! I think I must just peep in and look. It's so warm, it can't hurt me; and while I'm away, the bed will get cool again.' And, acting on the impulse of the moment, as was her usual habit, up jumped Milly, threw her little blue dressing-gown over her shoulders, thrust her feet into her slippers, and the next moment was pattering down the corridor on her way

to the oak chamber. She stood still and listened for a minute before opening the door; then, all being silent, she peeped into the room, into which the full harvest moon was shining brightly, the shutters and window curtains being unclosed. Milly's eyes turned to the chest, and then her heart seemed to leap right into her throat, she gave a little scream, and covering her face with her hands, stood shaking and shivering with fright. Was it really Lady Albertine she had seen standing by the chest dressing herself? If so, it was not such great fun after all seeing a ghost, but decidedly the reverse, or surely her heart would not beat so strangely. Poor little Milly's fright, however, was soon over; for, on hearing her scream, the figure sprang forward, and Jane's well-known voice exclaimed—

'Oh, Miss Milly, don't be frightened, it's only me. But whatever made you come here?'

'Oh, Jane,' cried the still trembling Milly, 'what a fright you have given me! I thought, of course, you were Lady Albertine.'

'Hush!' whispered Jane, closing the door gently, 'I wanted to frighten Mary, by pretending to be the ghostess, and so I came up early from supper, and slipped in here to dress myself up. I thought this afternoon, when you were trying on these things, how easy it would be to take in Mary.'

'What fun!' exclaimed Milly, at once entering into the idea, and quickly recovering from her fright. 'Oh, do let me see you. Make haste and finish dressing up; do, Jane.'

'No, Miss; you must go to bed; you'll catch your death of cold. I daren't let you stay here, master would be so angry.'

But Milly was determined to see the fun. 'I shan't hurt,

Jane, I tell you; I won't go back to bed. Now make haste, I hear her coming.'

In vain Jane remonstrated; thoughtless, wilful Milly was not to be turned from her purpose, and in order to avoid a scene, Jane was foolish enough to give way to the child; but she did so very unwillingly, for she knew how angry Mr. Grant and Miss Horne would be if they heard of it.

'Now, Jane,' said Milly, 'put on this hat, and these high-heeled shoes, and you'll be quite ready. Make haste. I really do hear her coming now;' and opening the door very softly, she peeped out and saw the glimmer of a candle at the end of the corridor. 'Yes, she's coming. Now, Jane, walk down to meet her; and mind you hold up your head in a stately manner, like Lady Albertine would have done.'

Thus admonished, and looking very much like a jay in borrowed plumes, Jane marched down the passage to meet the unsuspecting Mary. It was never without an inward tremor that the latter passed along the 'ghostly corridor' at night, and she was now advancing with a beating heart, casting timid glances first on one side, then on the other, wishing she had not been ashamed to have asked one of the other servants to bear her company, when a sudden rustling and creaking of the boards, as of some one approaching, so alarmed the foolish girl, that, overcome with fear, she stood still, trembling all over, perfectly powerless to move either one way or the other. There was no light in the gallery but that from the unsteady flame of the candle she carried in her hand. The rustling came nearer and nearer; Mary almost gasped for breath, while her eyes were fixed on an indistinct *something*, she knew not what, which seemed coming towards her out of the darkness; the next moment

the candlestick dropped from her hand with a loud clatter, and giving a piercing scream, she fell to the ground in convulsions.

'Oh! what have we done?' cried Milly, in real distress, clinging to Jane, who whispered hurriedly—

'Go to bed, Miss Milly; don't stay here. I hear some one coming; don't stay.'

The noise had reached the ears of Miss Horne, who, in a state of the greatest alarm, was hastening to discover the cause of it. Milly, paying no heed to Jane's words, flew along the passage to meet her, crying out, 'Oh, come quickly, Miss Horne; bring a light; we've killed Mary; make haste, make haste!'

'Milly—who—what—where?' began poor bewildered Miss Horne, as the excited child seized her hand and hurried her along the passage. Jane was kneeling by Mary, vainly trying to repair the effects of her unkind thoughtlessness, by soothing words and floods of tears. As the light fell on the curious-looking figure, Miss Horne started back, exclaiming, 'Who's that?'

'Only Jane dressed up as Lady Albertine,' said Milly. 'Mary took her for the ghost, and then fell down like this. Oh, how dreadful she looks!'

Mary's hands were clenched, her eyes wide open, and her face working convulsively. As soon as she saw the state the poor girl was in, Miss Horne exclaimed, 'Run down Milly, and send off instantly for the doctor; then ask Mr. Grant to come here.'

Milly flew to obey her orders, and by the time Herbert arrived up-stairs, he found nearly every servant in the house round the unfortunate girl. Jane was still kneeling by her side, making matters very much worse by her hysterical

weeping. Pushing her aside, Mr. Grant, assisted by the butler, raised Mary from the ground, and carried her into Miss Horne's bed-room, where she remained till the arrival of Mr. Crosse, the doctor.

Then Milly was carried off to bed; but she could not rest until she had made a full confession to her brother, and obtained his forgiveness. She was anxious to take all the blame on herself, and tried to persuade Herbert that Jane had not been at all in fault. But to this he could not agree, nor would he give Milly the promise she so earnestly entreated, that the girl might not be sent away in consequence of what had happened.

'I can make no promises now, Milly,' was all Mr. Grant would say, 'I must think the matter over first. Now, try and compose yourself, like a good child, or we shall have you ill again to-morrow.'

In spite, however, of her brother's parting injunction, it was a long time before Milly did compose herself sufficiently to go to sleep, and many were the good resolutions she formed to be wiser in future, and never again to indulge in practical jokes, before she at length forgot her troubles and drifted into dreamland, where, for the present, we will leave her, in order to visit fresh scenes and make fresh acquaintances.

CHAPTER V.

HERBERT'S LETTER.

THE church clock had just struck half-past eight, and the letter bag had at that moment been carried into the dining-room at Elworthy Rectory.

'Who is postwoman to-day?' asked Mr. Russell, looking round the breakfast table at his three youngest daughters as he unlocked the bag.

'Me postwoman,' cried out a golden-haired fairy about five years of age. 'Me coming; wait for me, papa;' and with some difficulty she clambered off her high chair and ran round to her father's side.

'There, then, little True, take your budget, three for mamma, one for Miss Carey, and one for Olive. Now, then, how many kisses for me?'

'Tant tount; but ever so many, more than a hundred.'

'Bring the letters round first, then, Miss Postman,' called out Mrs. Russell; 'for all these kisses will take some time.'

True delivered her letters with a great many double knocks, and then ran back to pay her debt of kisses.

'A letter from Herbert Grant, I declare!' said Mrs. Russell, as she broke the seal. 'I hope there's nothing the matter with that madcap, Milly.'

'Perhaps he repents having refused your offer, and wants you to take her off his hands,' said Mr. Russell, as he fed little Gertrude with bread and jam.

'Oh, I hope not!' exclaimed Olive, the eldest of the seven daughters. 'I am sure we don't want her here. Mrs. Marsh told us she was such a dreadful child, always in scrapes.'

'I don't suppose she is as demure and quiet as Lilly and Georgie Marsh,' said her father; 'but from all I have heard, she must be a warmhearted little thing. Her brother seems devoted to her. Just pour me out another cup of tea, my dear; mamma is too much absorbed in her letter to notice my empty cup. What a long yarn Herbert seems to have written!'

'Yes, he has,' said Mrs. Russell, as she laid down the letter and took up the teapot; 'I must read it to you before you go out. Have you quite finished, children? No, True, no more bread and jam. Look, Miss Carey's waiting for you. Now, baby Violet, mother will lift you down, and then you must run up to nurse. Take her with you, Sybil dear, and tell nurse the little ones are not to bathe to-day.'

When the children had left the room, Mrs. Russell said to her husband, 'There's many a true word said in jest. This letter from Herbert is actually to ask that Milly may come here.'

'What! is she too much for him? Let me hear what he says.'

Mrs. Russell commenced reading the letter, some passages of which we will quote :—

'FAIRFIELD MANOR, *August 20th.*

'MY DEAR MRS. RUSSELL,—In your last letter you said

you hoped I would bring Milly to see you any time after your return to Samborough, and I am writing now to ask when that event will take place, as, if you are not going there just yet, I think I must take her to the seaside for a short time first, as she requires a change. The little puss has not been very well lately, and looks thin and pale, the result, I suppose, of her two last scrapes, of which I must tell you to show you what a wild, thoughtless, but good-hearted, generous, and affectionate little creature she is.'

Then followed a short account of Joe's half-crown and Mary's fright, all of which we know.

'This ghost affair,' he went on, 'happened about four or five days ago; but the poor girl is still lying ill from the effects of the fright. Milly has taken it to heart very much, and I am sure it will be a long time before she again indulges in practical jokes. She is really and truly sorry for her thoughtlessness, and I hope she has learnt a lesson this time which will not be readily forgotten.

'For all that, I feel that it will never answer for her to go on living here with me. I am obliged to confess that my scheme has proved a failure. I see plainly that Milly is not a child to be educated by herself; she needs the companionship of other children, and of these there are, as you know, very few in this immediate neighbourhood. Mrs. Marsh's little girls are almost the only ones, and to them Milly has taken an inveterate dislike. Poor Miss Horne is an excellent person, but most unsuited as a governess to a child like Milly; she has just told me that it will be impossible for her to continue in her situation, as the constant anxiety she undergoes is too much for her health. Poor thing! when I engaged her she had visions of a little quiet pale girl, rather languid, as children sent home

from India usually are, instead of which she had a wild romp put under her charge! And now I want you to tell me what had better be done. Shall I keep her with me doing nothing, while I write out to India, or shall I make any arrangements about sending her to the school her mother spoke of? Or are you and Mr. Russell still anxious to have her to live with you? I shall miss her more than I can possibly tell you; for in many ways it is an immense pleasure to me to have her here; but I feel that I have undertaken a task very much beyond my powers, which humble confession, I daresay, you will not be surprised to hear!

'Will you kindly send me a speedy answer? Of course I have not yet mentioned the subject to Milly.—With kind regards to Mr. Russell, believe me, very sincerely yours,

'HERBERT GRANT.'

'Poor Herbert!' laughed Mr. Russell, 'he has evidently caught a Tartar in Miss Milly. Well, I am as ready as ever to have her here; I think the seven will be a match for her. What do you say, Mary?'

'Oh yes,' replied his wife; 'her scrapes don't frighten me; but I can quite fancy that she is beyond Miss Horne's management, from all I have heard of that lady. Of course the poor little creature wants companions. I never thought Herbert's scheme would succeed, or that it was a wise one; but it was so good and nice of him to wish to make a home for his little sister, that one couldn't put any opposition in the way, and it might perhaps have answered with a child of a different nature.'

'I think, if I were you, I should write and tell Herbert to bring her to us in about ten days' time. We shall be going

to Samborough next week, and I suppose we should be ready for them at the end of that time. Tell him to leave her with us on a two months' visit. We shall then be able to see which will be best for her—school, or a home with us.'

'Very well,' said Mrs. Russell; 'I'll write at once. I wonder what the children will say when they hear she is really coming!'

Mrs. Russell was Millicent's aunt; Mrs. Grant being her sister. Their father, Sir Charles Pocock, had been a judge out in India, and the two sisters, who lost their mother early in life, were educated in England under the care of their grandmother. When the time came for their return to India, Mrs. Grant was the only one who rejoined her father, her elder sister being engaged to be married to Mr. Russell. The two sisters felt the separation very much, for they were warmly attached to each other, and it was a great grief to Mrs. Russell, when her sister married Colonel Grant, to know that, in all probability, very many years would elapse before she and her husband would return to England. When Millicent was old enough to be sent home, she wrote at once, begging Mrs. Grant to let her have the care of her little niece.

Knowing her sister to have seven girls already, Mrs. Grant thought it hardly fair to inflict her with so much extra care and responsibility, much as she would have liked her child to have been under her wing, and she had almost decided on sending her to the school where she and her sister had been educated, when a letter from Herbert arrived, pleading so earnestly that he might make a home for his little sister, that Colonel Grant at once decided to agree to his wishes.

Milly, too, was all anxiety to live with the brother of whom she had heard so much, and did not seem to fancy the idea of school or of the seven little cousins in the same degree. So the knotty point was settled in Herbert's favour, and Mrs. Grant was comforted, in sending her darling home, by the thought of the loving hearts and open hands willing to receive her. Soon after Milly's arrival at Fairfield, it was arranged for Mrs. Russell and Olive to come on a visit to make acquaintance with her; but just before the day named, little Rhoda was taken ill with the measles, and in a very short time all the other children caught the complaint also, so that Mrs. Russell had her hands full for some time to come, and could not possibly leave home. It had, therefore, so happened that Milly had never seen her aunt or cousins. She knew that she and Herbert were to pay them a visit some time before the year was out, and she was looking forward to it with mingled feelings of dread and pleasure. She had the greatest possible desire to see her Aunt Mary, whose name had been a household word to her ever since she could remember; but having been so little with other children, the thought of the seven girls rather appalled her. She hardly knew, therefore, whether to be glad or sorry when, on the receipt of Mrs. Russell's letter, Herbert told her that their contemplated visit was to take place almost immediately, and that it would be a very long one as far as she was concerned. For the present he thought it better to say nothing of the probable change of homes.

'Are we going to Elworthy or to Samborough?' she asked.

'To Samborough,' answered Herbert. 'Mr. Russell is in residence now, and will spend the next three months there.'

Mr. Russell was one of the canons of Samborough Cathedral.

'And what will Miss Horne do?' asked Milly.

Then Herbert told her that Miss Horne was not going to be her governess any longer.

'But why?' cried Milly. 'Have I been too naughty? Oh, Herbert, I am so sorry!'

'Well, run and tell her so,' said her brother, which Milly did in a fit of contrition, and was much comforted by her governess's assurance that whatever trouble and anxiety she might have caused her, it would be with feelings of real sorrow that she would wish her goodbye.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEVEN SISTERS.

'MAMMA, we've finished our packing; so, may Hilda and I go for a last walk on the sands this afternoon?' asked Olive Russell the day previous to their departure from Elworthy.

'Yes, dear; but you must ask Miss Carey to go with you.'

'Oh, must we? Well, then, may Ethel and Rhoda go too?'

'Not Rhoda, certainly; she is not strong enough for so long a walk. Why can't you two go with Miss Carey?'

'So we can; but we wanted to talk together, and we can't well walk on in front, and leave Miss Carey by herself. Will it hurt Ethel to go?'

'Well, take her, then, if you and Hilda have such important secrets to discuss. And now run away, dear children, for I really am very busy.'

'Come along, Olive,' said Hilda; 'let 's go and find Ethel.'

This was easily done, for every one knew Ethel's haunt in fine weather,—a large cedar on the lawn, where, perched on a low, spreading branch, with her kitten and a book, she was sure to be found in all her spare moments.

'Oh, Ethie dear,' began Olive in a coaxing voice, 'will you come with us on the sands this afternoon?'

'Do,' added Hilda; 'we want you so much.'

'What for?' asked Ethel, looking up from her book reluctantly. 'I wanted so much to finish this story, and mamma says I mustn't take it away, as it is only lent to me.'

'Oh, but do go, Ethel dear,' said Olive imploringly. 'Hilda and I want a last walk and talk on the sands, and we can't leave Miss Carey to walk alone.'

'Is Rhoda going?' asked Ethel.

'No. Mamma thinks it would knock her up.'

'Oh dear,' and Ethel looked wistfully at her book; 'I did want to read this afternoon.'

'Never mind, then,' said Hilda. 'Come along, Olive; don't bother her to go if she would rather not.'

But the burden of Olive's song was still 'Oh do, Ethel;' whereupon Ethel, who was always willing to give up to others, resigned herself to her fate, with a smile and a sigh, saying—

'Very well, then, I'll go. What time do you want me to be ready?'

'At four. Thank you, dear, *so* much,' and, well pleased at having gained her point, Olive turned away humming a tune. Hilda followed her slowly into the house, asking herself as she went, whether it was quite as it should be, for Ethel always to be the one to give up to everybody else in the house; certainly it seemed no trouble to her, but was it quite fair and just? This was what Hilda could not determine to her own satisfaction. She need not, however, have troubled herself, for Ethel was no object of pity, but one rather to be envied, inasmuch as she possessed the

blessed quality of self-denial. Still Hilda was right in thinking that her sister's good-nature ought not to be too much imposed upon, as it sometimes was by Olive.

Ethel was quite ready by four o'clock, and, to all appearance, as anxious for the walk as her sisters. When they had reached the sands, and were walking on together, Olive heaved a deep sigh, and said to her sister, 'How tiresome it will be, Hilda, having this little Milly to live with us! I think that, as Mr. Grant wouldn't hear of her coming to us at first, he ought to be made to keep her himself now.'

'It is tiresome,' answered Hilda; 'but I daresay we shall get on very well with her after a little. She will be more with Ethel and Rhoda than with us.'

'I don't know that,' said Olive. 'I expect mamma will want us to look after her, as she is such a dreadful child for getting into scrapes. Really it is very tiresome having another girl in the house; I'm sure there are plenty of us already to take turns at walking, riding, or driving with mamma; and, of course, Milly will want her share in everything.'

'Of course she will; but surely you won't mind that?'

'Oh, you are so provoking, Hilda; you always try to make out that I say disagreeable things, and you never will join in anything I do say! When I want to grumble you won't, and when I don't want to grumble you do!'

'I'm very sorry; but I can't say I agree with you when I don't.'

'Nobody wants you to say so,' said Olive sharply; 'but you might agree sometimes, if you chose.'

Hilda made no reply. She was accustomed to these little fits of petulance from her sister; and when they occurred,

she tried, as on the present occasion, to change the conversation.

'What fun it would be, Olive, if Mr. Grant would bring his yacht here next summer, and take us all out for a sail now and then!'

'Not much fun to me,' returned Olive; 'you know I'm always sea-sick.'

'You have only been out in steamers and small boats; perhaps you wouldn't be ill in a large yacht.'

'I don't know, I'm sure.'

'It would be great fun to catch one's own fish, and to bring up all kinds of curiosities dredging,' went on Hilda. 'What splendid creatures we could get for our aquarium!'

'Yes, perhaps we might,' said Olive, gradually recovering her temper; 'but I daresay Mr. Grant will never come here in his yacht; so what's the use of talking about it?'

'Oh, but he very likely will, if Milly is still with us next summer; anyhow, it is pleasant to talk about, and—'

'And you want to put me into a good humour again,' said Olive, laughing, and putting her arm round her sister's neck. 'You're a good old thing, Hilda, and I'm very sorry for having been cross;' and during the rest of the walk Olive was as cheerful and pleasant as possible. She was easily put out; but her little disagreeable fits never lasted very long.

Meanwhile, Ethel, allowing no visions of the pleasant, unfinished story-book to trouble her mind, was enjoying her walk quite as much as though it had been one of her own seeking. She was one of those who make the most of the present hour; who wisely 'kiss the joy as it flies,' and look ever on the brightest side of life. Sometimes those blessed with a light heart and happy disposition are inclined to be

flighty and thoughtless, and have no great depth of feeling; but this was not the case with little Ethel. She had both depth and strength of character; and although, perhaps, she might not talk and laugh as much even as her sisters, there was a look of inward happiness in her face which theirs did not possess. She was a child of whom it was only natural for her governess to be very fond, as she gave little or no trouble with her lessons; and Miss Carey, although she loved all her pupils very dearly, could not help giving Ethel the warmest place in her heart. On the present occasion she tried to make her walk a pleasant one; for although the little girl said nothing about it, she knew that Ethel had only come to please her sisters. So, as they walked along, Miss Carey told her stories of her own childhood, which had been an unusually happy one; and these stories her little pupils were never tired of hearing, for, having travelled a great deal in her youth, and made good use of her eyes and ears, she was a particularly pleasant companion. Like many others compelled in after-life to work for a living, Miss Carey had been brought up in affluence. Ill-judged investments, however, followed by her father's sudden death, and the subsequent mismanagement of his affairs, had sent her out into the world, at the age of thirty, in the capacity of a governess, and for the last four years she had found a happy home with the Russells. Her friends were apt to pity her for having five pupils in the schoolroom, and thought it must be an arduous charge for one person; but Miss Carey was so much assisted by masters, both at Elworthy and Samborough, that she did not feel it so; neither was she in the least dismayed at the thought of the sixth pupil, namely, Millicent Grant, who was so soon to arrive.

Before leaving the sands, Ethel said she wished to pick

up as many shells as she could carry away with her, for the little grotto she and Rhoda had planned to make in the garden at Samborough; and while assisting her to collect them, Miss Carey suggested that very likely Millicent would enjoy helping them to make the grotto.

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'I daresay she will. I told Rhoda we must let her if she wished it. I wonder what she will be like, Miss Carey, and if we shall get on with her?'

'Oh yes; I am sure you will in a little time; but of course it will be very strange to her at first, coming into the midst of such a large family: we must all be very kind to her.'

'I wonder if she will be very shy?'

'I should fancy not, from all I have heard,' replied Miss Carey; 'although, perhaps, from being unaccustomed to other children, she may be shyer with them than with grown-up people, to whom she has been accustomed all her life.'

'She must be very kind-hearted, I think,' said Ethel. 'Hilda says she went out all by herself one night to take half a crown to an old woman, and then went on, all in the dark, to fetch the doctor, because the old woman's daughter was ill.'

'Yes, I heard the story too; but although I admire her courage and kindness of heart, I think she was very wilful and disobedient to go out that evening, as she knew she ought not to do so.'

'I suppose it was wrong,' said Ethel, thoughtfully; 'but, Miss Carey, oughtn't promises always to be kept?'

'Certainly they should. A promise should never be given hastily; but I don't think Milly had made any, had she?'

'No; but Mr. Grant had, and she did not like him to break it.'

'Ah! but she needn't have meddled with his promises. To do herself what she knew to be wrong, would scarcely mend matters; and for the good she actually did, she might as well have been in bed instead of causing so much alarm and anxiety. However, we must hope that good sense, joined to good feeling, will soon teach her to be less headstrong and wilful.'

'I don't think Olive and Rhoda like her to come much.'

'Why not?' asked Miss Carey.

'Well, I don't exactly know Olive's reasons; but Rhoda is so silly, she says that I shan't be as much with her as I am now, just because I happen to be Milly's age. As if I could ever be fonder of any one than Rhoda. I wish she wouldn't always be thinking these things.'

'She is very far from well, you see, poor little girl; but as she grows older and stronger, I daresay she will lose all her little foolish fancies.'

As they entered the house, Rhoda met them with a very doleful face.

'Oh, what a time you have been, Ethel!' she began in a fretful tone. 'You might have thought of me a little; I've been quite alone, and have had nothing to do; all the books are packed and—'

'Sibbie and the little ones and mamma were at home, weren't they?'

'Sibbie! as if she was any good to me; why, she's never in one place two minutes together; and of course mamma was too busy to have me with her.'

'Well, I'm very sorry, dear; but look at all these beautiful shells Miss Carey and I have picked up for the grotto. With those we've got at Samborough, we have enough to begin now, I think.'

'It will take so long to make,' said Rhoda, discontentedly.

'Oh no, it won't; and there will be Milly to help us, you know.'

Rhoda pushed the shells aside pettishly. 'Yes, I know what it will be; I shan't be allowed to work at it because I'm not well, and you and Milly will be always doing it, and always together, and I shall be left quite alone,' and she looked very much inclined to cry.

'Oh don't, Rhoda, dear,' said Ethel, putting her arms round her neck; 'you know very well that I should never leave you alone for any one or anything; besides, I'm sure mamma will let you work at the grotto on fine days, and when you mustn't do it, we won't either. And now,' she added as the cloud passed from Rhoda's face, 'come along up-stairs and help me pack these shells, and then Olive and Hilda want us to go into their room to see their presents for Cousin Milly.'

CHAPTER VII.

A WARM RECEPTION.

'NOW then, Milly, are you ready?' asked Mr. Grant on the morning of their departure from Fairfield; 'the carriage is at the door, and we've no time to lose.'

'Yes, Herbert, I'm coming. Goodbye again, dear Miss Horne; don't forget to write to me; I'll try and remember all you said last night. Goodbye, Jane; remember to feed my rabbits every day, and give Mary the books I left for her on my table, and—'

'Jump in, Milly,' interrupted her brother, 'or we shall be late. That's right. Now, here's your basket, and the sandwiches and the flowers; why, they'll all be dead long before you get there. Is that all? Yes? All right, then. Robert, drive on. Goodbye, Miss Horne; Milly shall write to-morrow;' and away whirled the carriage.

Miss Horne and Jane stood at the door until it was out of sight, and then each, heaving a deep sigh, went into the house.

'God bless her!' said Jane to herself as she made her way to Mary's room, 'she has a good heart of her own, if

ever there was one.' It was entirely owing to Milly's entreaties that Mr. Grant still retained Jane in his service. He had intended to send her away, being naturally very angry with her for the foolish trick she had played on Mary; but his little sister was so distressed at the idea, and took it so much to heart, blaming herself for all that had happened, that when the Samborough plan was arranged, Mr. Grant agreed to keep Jane on at Fairfield as housemaid, and Milly's kind little heart was satisfied.

Through some friends in London, Miss Horne had heard of an engagement as daily governess to two little girls, and she was to go up to town two or three days after the Grants' departure. It was a pleasant idea to think she should so soon see her dear old mother and her niece; but notwithstanding all the trouble that her little pupil had given her, it was with a heavy heart that she wished her goodbye. Perhaps she scarcely realized till the hour of parting how really fond she was of the child.

On the whole, Milly began her journey in good spirits; she enjoyed travelling with Herbert, and was very anxious to see Aunt Mary; and there was a certain amount of excitement in meeting her unknown cousins, which was not displeasing to her.

'Now, let me see,' she said, when they had been some little time in the train, drawing out a paper from her pocket as she spoke; 'I hope I haven't forgotten my lesson; will you hear me their names and ages, please?'

Herbert took the paper, laughing, and she began—

'Olive, just 13.
Hilda, nearly 12.
Ethel, past 10.
Rhoda, exactly 9.

Sybil, only 7.
Gertrude, about 5.
Violet, under 4.

Come, I've said it perfectly this time. What pretty names they all have! Don't you think so, Herbert?'

'Yes, they are very pretty indeed; I hardly know which I like the best—Ethel, I think. Do you?'

'No; I like either Hilda or Sybil; but somehow or other I think Ethel will be my chief friend.'

'And why, Milly?'

'Well, she's about my own age; and I remember Aunt Mary used to say more about her than of any of the others in her letters. She said she was so good and unselfish.'

'I trust you will be happy with them all, my darling,' said her brother. 'It will be quite a new life for you; but I am sure you will soon love Mrs. Russell.'

'Yes, I think I shall; but I wish you were going to stay longer, Herbert. A week will be gone directly.'

'Still, you will be a little accustomed to them all by that time; and then, you know, I shall write to you very often, Milly.'

'Yes, that *will* be nice; and I shall send you such long answers, and tell you all I am doing. Will you read them, I wonder?'

'Of course I shall, every word; only don't cross your letters, or it might make them difficult to read. I don't know how I shall get on at Fairfield without my little plague,' replied Mr. Grant, stroking her long golden hair fondly.

'Then, why do you send me away, Herbert?' she asked, nestling up to him.

'Because I am sure it will be for your happiness, my

darling; you ought to have companions of your own age, and to lead a more cheerful life than you do with me.'

'I wonder whether Miss Carey will be like Miss Horne?' said Milly. 'She must be very clever to teach so many girls at the same time. Will she teach me too, Herbert?'

'Yes, I suppose so; but I know Mrs. Russell has masters for the girls as well; there are very good ones at Samborough, and also at S——, which, you know, is a large watering-place in Sussex, and only a mile from Elworthy Rectory.'

'Then that is where they generally live, I suppose?' said Milly.

'Yes; I don't think they are more than three months of the year at Samborough. There is a beautiful cathedral there, which I think you will like to see, and where you will go every Sunday. You are so fond of music that you will enjoy the choral service very much.'

'Yes,' replied Milly, 'it will be very nice; but I think I would rather be going to Elworthy. I want to see the sea so much again; and it would be such fun digging in the sands and picking up shells.'

'Well, the time will soon pass away; and then, if you like, you can stay with them at Elworthy; but I shall want you at Christmas, mind.'

'And I shall want to come, I should think so, you dear old Herbert,' cried Millicent, jumping up from her seat, and upsetting the packet of sandwiches which lay open on her lap, as she threw her arms round her brother's neck. 'What shall I do without you? it will be so horrid!'

'Your luncheon will be horrid, I think,' said Mr. Grant, laughing. 'Look at your sandwiches on the dusty floor.'

'Ugh! so they are. I can't eat them now. Never mind,

I've got some biscuits in my bag, and here is your packet of sandwiches all right.'

It was late in the afternoon before they reached Samborough, and by that time Milly was heartily tired of the journey, and very thankful to step out of the hot, dusty railway carriage. It is more than probable that Mr. Grant shared her feelings, for he was beginning to be slightly fatigued with the 'oh dears' and numerous weary ejaculations of his small, fidgety charge. Mr. Russell's carriage was waiting for them, and, after a very short drive through the crowded streets, the coachman turned in under an old gateway leading to the cathedral, and stopped before the door of a long, low, irregularly-built house. Millicent clung shyly to her brother's arm as they entered the hall; but had no sooner caught sight of Mrs. Russell's face, as she advanced to meet her, than she sprang forward, and throwing her arms round her aunt's neck, called out, 'Oh, Aunt Mary! Aunt Mary! you're so like mamma, dear, dear mamma; oh, I'm so glad!' and then putting her head on her shoulder, she burst into tears. Mrs. Russell, making a sign to Herbert not to follow, carried her into the drawing-room, and still keeping her in her arms, sat down on a sofa, soothing her with gentle words and loving kisses, which were inexpressibly sweet to poor little mother-sick Milly. 'Oh, I'm so happy!' she said at last, when she could speak. 'It is so like being with mamma again; and I *have* wanted her so much, Aunt Mary.'

'Have you, my darling? I can well believe it. With God's help, my Milly, I will try and supply her place to you. So you think we are alike?'

'Oh yes,' answered Milly, looking up into her aunt's face. 'You've the same pretty brown hair, the same blue

eyes, and the same kind look; and, better than all, Aunt Mary, your voice is just like mamma's, so soft and sweet. I could almost think she was speaking to me again. Oh! I'm sure I shall never get into any scrapes while I'm with you.'

'Scrapes, indeed! I should think not,' said Mrs. Russell, cheerfully. 'And now, my little eighth daughter, come and see Uncle Frank and the seven sisters. We'll take off your hat and cloak first—there; they can stay here for the present. And now, come with me.' Aunt Mary led her into the library, where Mr. Russell was standing talking to Mr. Grant. 'Here's the little woman,' said Mrs. Russell.

'And here's Uncle Frank very anxious to give her a good hug,' said Mr. Russell, coming forward and taking her in his arms. 'My little ones call me an old bear, Milly, because they say I'm so big and shaggy; so, to revenge their impertinence, I give them tremendous hugs now and then.' Milly looked up laughing, and thought the nickname a very suitable one, as she caught sight of his thick rough head of hair and bushy eyebrows. But from under the fierce eyebrows, a pair of soft grey eyes were looking into hers so kindly, that she felt sure she should love Uncle Frank very dearly.

'Where are the children?' asked Herbert. 'I am very anxious, and so, I am sure, is Milly, to see the septet.'

'They are coming now,' said Mrs. Russell, hearing voices outside; but when the door opened, it was only to admit Gertrude's and Violet's little heads. 'Here, at least, are the two youngest. Come in, darlings; where are the others? Cousin Milly is here.'

'They are all ready outside,' said little True; 'but they're too shy to come in, so we've come first.'

'Milly introduced to her Cousins.'—*Page* 59.

'What! Sibbie shy? No, I'll never believe that,' said Mr. Russell, laughing; and going to the door, he called out, 'Come along, come along, nobody wants to eat any of you. Now, Tib-the-cat, don't stand prowling outside any longer. It's a good joke pretending *you're* shy; I expect the truth is you're not fit to be seen. Here, Herbert,' he added, catching hold of her and taking her up to Mr. Grant, 'let me introduce you to my fifth daughter, by name, Sybil Russell, but more familiarly know as Tib-the-cat, or the young prowler.'

Sibbie, the romp of the family, and by turns the pet and plague of her sisters, tossed back her rough, tangled, brown locks, and lifting her merry green eyes to Mr. Grant's face, put up a rosy but very grimy face to be kissed, at the same time telling her father he was a bad boy to call her such horrid names.

'Oh, Sibbie, what a face! and what hands!' said her mother. 'Where have you been? what will Cousin Milly think of you?'

Herbert laughed. 'They will be kindred spirits, I expect. Come here, you jolly little thing, and tell me what you've been doing.'

Sibbie perched herself on his knee, nothing loth. 'Oh,' she said, laughing, 'I've only been with the cat and kittens in the coal-house. I've got six kittens; such beauties, oh, *so* pretty! Milly, you shall have three if you like. Come along, let me show you them now.' And, jumping up, she caught hold of Millicent, and was about to drag her off, when Mrs. Russell came to the rescue, and telling Sibbie to go up-stairs and get ready for tea, she called to the four elder children to come and make friends with their little cousin.

Milly felt very shy, as they all gathered round her, and

so many pairs of eyes were fixed on her face. She wondered what she ought to say, but could think of nothing, and it was a great relief when Violet, taking hold of her hand, said, 'Oh, Tousin Milly, do tum up 'tairs to tea, me so hungry, and dere's such nicey take for 'oo.'

'You greedy little thing,' said her father, laughing, catching her up in his arms, 'who is it wants some of Milly's nice "take," eh? Oh, you cunning little monkey! Mind you don't give her a bit, Milly.'

'Oh yes, 'oo will,' said Violet, looking down coaxingly at her cousin from the height of her father's shoulder; ''oo not greedy, I'm sure.'

'You shall have it all, you little darling,' said Milly, laughing; and Violet, giving her father a triumphant look, said—

'Tank 'oo; but dive True tum too.'

'No,' said that dignified little lady; 'Milly must eat it all herself. She's a visitor, you know, Violet; for shame to ask for her cake.'

Violet, in no way abashed at her sister's rebuke, only laughed, and whispered to her father as he carried her off, 'True's always peeching (preaching); but I know she'd like tum take.'

'And now come up and see your room, dear Milly,' said her aunt; 'and then I daresay you won't be sorry to have some of Violet's much-talked-of tea and cake. I daresay this house will seem very small to you after Fairfield,' she added, as she led the way up the broad, easy staircase. 'I have given you a little room next to Olive and Hilda, and all the children have been very busy getting it ready for you.'

'Oh, how pretty! What a sweet little room!' cried Milly in a flutter of delight; and truly it was a dainty little bower her aunt had prepared for her, and one which any little girl would have been proud to call her own. There were pictures and photographs on the wall, a hanging bookcase filled with charming story-books, pretty vases and nick-nacks, gifts from her cousins, on the mantelpiece, flowers on the table, and in a retired nook near the bow window was a full-length portrait, in water colours, of a beautiful girl about eighteen, with bright wavy hair, and large deep-blue eyes. Underneath the picture was a small writing-table, nicely fitted up.

'This is where I expect you will write all your letters to India,' said Mrs. Russell, smiling, as Milly stood entranced before her mother's likeness, the tears running down her cheeks, and her heart too full for any words. 'I thought this would make a nice little writing-nook for you, there is such a pretty peep of the cathedral through this right-hand window. Is mamma much altered, Milly? it is so difficult to judge from photographs. This picture was the image of her before she left England; but that is fourteen long years ago.'

'It is so like her still,' said Milly. 'Of course she looks older, and she is not so thin now; but the eyes, hair, and look are just the same. Oh! dear, dear Aunt Mary, how can I love you enough! Oh! I must tell Herbert to come up and look at mamma, may I? May I run down and bring him up here, Aunt Mary?'

'Yes, my darling, of course you may.'

Herbert was almost as much overcome as Milly, when he saw the loving care evinced in all Mrs. Russell's arrangements for his little sister's comfort and happiness. He

admired his stepmother's portrait as much as even Milly could desire, and filled her cup of joy to the brim by telling her that she would be excessively like the picture when she grew up. As he was leaving the room, he took hold of Mrs. Russell's hand, saying with a smile and a sigh—

'What a conceited, foolish fellow I was, to think that I could make as happy a home for the child as you!'

'Don't say that,' she answered quickly; 'under different circumstances your plan might have answered perfectly; as it is, the seven months spent with you have been of the greatest service to Milly, in making her know and love you so thoroughly. She would never otherwise have felt the implicit confidence in you that she does now, and that is a great point gained.'

Milly went to bed very soon after tea, for she was quite worn out with the pleasurable excitement of this never-to-be-forgotten day.

Notwithstanding her fatigues, however, her prayers were longer and more earnest than usual that night, for she felt she had so much to be thankful for; and almost her last thought before going to sleep was this: 'How good of God to let Aunt Mary be so like mamma!'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST DAY.

MILLY slept well notwithstanding her excitement, and was up and dressed next morning before the eight o'clock bell had rung for prayers. Passing the schoolroom on her way down stairs, she saw Hilda standing by the window, talking to her bullfinch, and trying to coax him to pipe. Milly went up to her.

'Good morning,' said Hilda, kissing her; 'how early you are! Aren't you very tired to-day after your journey?'

'No, thank you, not at all, I slept so well. What a dear little bird, Hilda! Is he tame?'

'Yes, very; I often let him out, and he flies about the room, and sometimes perches on my shoulder. I am trying to teach him to pipe; but it is very hard work. I come down early every morning, and play to him on this bird-organ; but he's not a German bullfinch, and I don't think he will ever learn. Sometimes he begins a bar or two; but he leaves off again directly. Are you fond of birds, Milly?'

'Oh yes, and of every animal in the world, I think. I've left such dear little rabbits at home, and such a darling pony! Herbert said perhaps Uncle Frank would let me have it here, only he didn't know who would ride with me.'

'I am sure he would like you to have it very much,' said Hilda. 'We've one between us, a nice shaggy old Shetland; sometimes papa takes us out, and sometimes we go with the Clives.'

'Who are the Clives?' asked Milly.

'An old gentleman and his nephew who live in this place. Maurice Clive is about Olive's age—thirteen, you know. He is an orphan, and lives always with his uncle, who thinks him too delicate to send to school, and so has a tutor for him at home.'

'Is he nice?'

'Who?—Maurice? Pretty well. Yes, I like him sometimes very much; but he gets on better with Olive than with me. I am such a coward, he says.'

'What a shame!' said Milly indignantly. She had taken a great fancy to the pale, gentle Hilda. 'I don't believe you are one.'

'Well, I don't know; I think perhaps he is right. I'm not nearly so brave at riding as Olive, and I don't like hearing a gun go off close to me; I can't help giving a great jump at any sudden noise.'

'Still it is very rude of him to call you a coward,' persisted Milly.

'Oh, you see we know him very well, and I suppose he only said it to teaze me; anyhow I don't mind one bit. Do you like boys, Milly?'

'I always thought it would be very jolly to have a brother,' answered Millicent; 'but then I shouldn't like him to teaze me, or be rude to me. I should like to pick a nice one out of a story-book.'

'But you have got a brother, and I'm sure he's very nice.'

'Herbert, you mean? Of course he's a darling; but I

meant a brother of my very own, nearer my age, who would play with me.'

'Olive is always wishing she had two or three brothers,' said Hilda; 'but I think we get on very well without them; and papa says he is very glad we are all girls. Oh, there's the bell; now, Milly, we must go down to prayers.'

After breakfast Mr. Grant proposed to show Milly the cathedral, and Hilda asked to be allowed to accompany them as guide. The children were to have a holiday in honour of their cousin's arrival, so that she was not wanted in the schoolroom.

'Pray, come,' answered Herbert; 'for I shan't know in the least what I ought to point out; and, of all things, I detest being pounced upon by a verger with a huge bunch of keys in his hand.'

'Oh, that practice isn't allowed here,' said Mr. Russell. 'Sightseers may keep their half-crowns in their pockets in future, for one of the many acts of reforms of our new bishop has been to throw open the cathedral from ten to four, so that any one may enter to any and every part of it. He has also had cards printed and hung about the nave for the use of strangers.'

'Giving them particulars of the cathedral, I suppose? What a good plan!'

'Hilda is a capital guide,' said her mother, after she had left the room to get ready; 'she knows and loves every stone of the building. She very often spends an hour quite alone there.'

'Is she a dreamy child, then?' asked Herbert. 'She looks so very sensible and matter-of-fact. I should have thought Olive more given to being alone, and all that kind of thing.'

'Oh no. Olive is not at all fond of her own society. It would bore her excessively to have too much of it. Appearances are deceitful. Olive hasn't half as much romance or love of the beautiful in her as Hilda, notwithstanding her oval face and large dark eyes which give you the idea of it. Hilda is not dreamy, but she is very imaginative, and yet at the same time very matter-of-fact.'

'Their different characters must be quite a study,' said Mr. Grant.

'Yes, they all vary very much; but, on the whole, we have very little trouble with them; for, thank God, they have all warm hearts. Of course they have their little differences now and then, but they are soon over; for, in reality, they are devoted to each other.'

'I am sorry to see that Rhoda still looks pale and languid,' said Herbert.

'Yes, poor child, she has always been the delicate one, and, in consequence, the only one in the least spoilt. She will grow out of both calamities in time, I hope. Here, come, Hilda and Milly, so now I'll leave you to their tender mercies.'

'You are very fond of the cathedral, are you not, Hilda?' asked Herbert, as they walked along.

'Yes, very,' she replied; 'I always feel as if it belonged to us. I was born here, you know; but the others were all born at Elworthy, and I think I am the only one who likes Samborough best.'

'Do you like the cathedral better than the sea and sands?' asked Milly, surprised at her cousin's taste.

'Oh yes, much better. I am never so happy as when I am wandering about the nave, or looking at this beautiful west front.'

They were standing opposite it as she spoke, and very indifferent indeed to the beautiful must any one have been, who could look at that rich specimen of pointed architecture without feeling the deepest admiration.

'You see those three niches above the high arches, Milly?'

'Yes, with figures in them.'

'Well, those are the three saints to whom the cathedral is dedicated—St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Andrew. St. Peter stands in the middle niche, and is holding a large key in his hand.'

'And who do the figures represent in the small niches beneath those three beautiful circular windows?' asked Herbert.

'They are the six kings, repeated in each set of niches, who reigned in England between the Norman conquest and the time at which the front was built, twelve hundred and something.'

'Now then, Milly, out with their names,' said her brother.

'It's too easy,' she replied; 'ask me something more difficult. Any one can say the kings of England from William the Conqueror.'

'Well, tell me the name of the sixth, then, sharp off, without thinking.'

'Oh, don't, Herbert; ask Hilda, it's her cathedral, not mine.'

'You little impostor!' laughed her brother; 'I knew you couldn't tell. It would be an insult to ask Hilda. Of course she knows.'

'I suppose John must be the sixth king, as he lived somewhere about twelve hundred,' said Hilda.

'Come now,' said Milly, who had been running the names

over in her mind; 'I know better than that. John was the seventh king from the Conquest.'

'The two Williams, Henry, Stephen, Henry II., Richard, John,—yes, you're right,' said Hilda. 'Well, I don't know how that is, then, unless when the front was erected they didn't count the then reigning king, who is always supposed to have been John.'

'That may very likely have been the case,' observed Mr. Grant.

After a little longer admiration of the numerous and beautiful arches, columns, spires, pinnacles, doorways, etc., of the west front, they passed through the curious little porch in the centre of the building, and entered the nave. Here they remained for some time, admiring the massive pillars and high Norman arches, which are so beautiful from their extreme simplicity. Hilda was delighted at Mr. Grant's keen appreciation of her beloved cathedral; and, forgetting her usual reserve and shyness, she chatted away to him as if she had known him for years, whereas it so happened she was almost the only one of the sisters he had never seen before.

'There are no monuments to show you,' she said, as they walked round. 'Here is the spot where poor Mary Queen of Scots was buried, till James I. took away her body to Westminster Abbey, and a little farther on we shall see Catharine of Aragon's black marble slab.'

'I suppose their monuments, and others too, were all destroyed in Cromwell's time?' said Herbert.

'Yes, the horrid soldiers even took away poor Queen Catharine's black velvet pall which covered her coffin, and they destroyed all the painted glass, which is said to have been most beautiful.'

'Have you ever seen any other cathedral?' asked Herbert.

'Only Salisbury. The spire is very fine, but inside it is nothing to this.'

'No; but the spire certainly is most glorious. I remember, the first time I ever went to Salisbury, a railway porter pointing it out to me, and saying enthusiastically—"Look at it, sir, ain't it beautiful? Doesn't it look as if it had growed up of itself, all of a sudden like, without the help of human hands?"'

'And so it does,' said Hilda; 'what a nice feeling porter he must have been! Some one told me the other day that Salisbury Cathedral is said to have as many windows as there are days in the year, as many doors as months, and as many pillars as hours. I wonder if it is true?'

'I can't say indeed: 8760 pillars sound a great many! When you come and pay us a visit at Fairfield, Hilda, we'll make a little tour of cathedrals; there are several not very far from our part of the world, you know.'

Hilda coloured with pleasure, and inwardly hoped Mr. Grant would not forget his promise. On leaving the cathedral they walked round it, to look at it externally from every point of view, and then returned home; when Mr. Grant went to his room to write letters, and Milly was pounced upon and carried off, nothing loth, by Sibbie, to visit her kittens and the rest of the live stock.

'Oh, I'm so glad you've come back,' she began; 'what a time you've been in that stupid old cathedral! Hilda would like to sleep there, I do believe.'

'It would be rather cold,' said Milly, laughing. 'What makes her so fond of it?'

'Oh! I don't know, she's so funny; but she's a dear old

duck, you know. I'm so fond of her, I wish she was my little mother.'

'What do you mean?' asked Milly, staring at her cousin.

'Don't you know the little ones call Olive and Hilda their little mothers? Violet is Olive's child, and True is Hilda's. They do all sorts of things for them—brush their hair before dinner, wash their hands, button their boots, and a lot more.'

'Why don't you ask Ethel to be your mother, then?'

'Oh, I don't know; nobody wants me. I'm an odd one, and belong to no one. There's Olive and Hilda, Ethel and Rhoda, True and Violet, but there's no one to go with me, unless—' a bright idea striking her, 'you will, Milly. Will you? you're odd too.'

'Well, you see, Sibbie dear,' began Milly, not quite liking either to refuse or accept the offer, 'I think I had better not belong to any one in particular just yet, as—'

'Oh, very well,' said Sibbie, carelessly shaking her hair off her face; 'it doesn't matter, you know. I'd just as soon play with the dogs or the cats.'

Which speech Milly thought slightly unflattering; but she was glad her funny little cousin was not offended with her.

Taking offence, she found out afterwards, was not at all in Sybil's line. Plain-spoken herself, she was quite content that others should be the same with her. She was so accustomed to be laughed at for this, that, or the other, and, when any mischief had been perpetrated, to have it at once saddled on her, that she had become very callous to her position as the delinquent of the family, and accepted it as a matter of course. Of one thing she felt secure, and that was that her word was never doubted.

Truth reigned supreme in her honest green eyes and open

face; and, however much circumstances might be against her, when Sybil said, 'I know nothing about it,' nobody ever questioned her assertion for one moment.

'We'll look at the kittens first, Milly, shall we? They are in here;' and, opening the door of the very grimy abode in which her pets resided, she walked in without the slightest hesitation, telling Milly to follow. But Milly remained outside, not liking the look of the feline habitation. 'Aren't you coming?' called out Sibbie; 'what are you afraid of?'

'Will you bring them to me out here?' called back Millicent. 'I shall get so dirty if I come in.'

Sybil went into fits of laughter.

'Fancy caring for that! Oh, you funny Milly! Here,' as she emerged from the black depths; 'hold up your dress, and I'll put them into it. Now, aren't they beauties?' she went on, as she put the six blind little kittens one by one very carefully into Milly's frock. 'Not one of you shall be drowned, you little dears; no, no, indeed, I won't allow that; you shall all grow up into cats, and then, with your mother, there will be one a-piece for us seven sisters. Oh! I forgot you, Milly; you must have one too. Well, I dare-say I can pick up a stray cat somewhere or other, there are lots about, and the cruel boys only pelt them with stones.'

'What do you mean by abusing boys?' said a voice behind them, and, with a little scream of delight, Sybil flew into the newcomer's arms.

'Oh, not you, you dear old Maurice; you're not cruel! I'm sure you wouldn't like to pelt poor cats, or drown any of my little kittens.'

'No, indeed; let's have a look at them, Sib; queer little beggars, ain't they, with their blind eyes? I say,' lowering

his voice, and bending over the kittens, 'who's this holding them?'

'Cousin Milly, to be sure; didn't you know?' answered Sibbie, surprised, while Millicent felt very much inclined to drop the kittens and run away.

'Oh! to be sure,' said Maurice; and he thought to himself, 'she looks a jolly kind of girl enough.'

'Now come and see the dogs,' said Sibbie, putting the kittens back into their dingy home; 'and then, oh then, Maurice, let's have a game of cricket.'

'Very well,' he agreed, good-naturedly.

'Will you play?' turning to Milly.

'I never have; but I'm sure I could soon learn,' she said, eagerly; for to play at cricket had long been her ambition.

'I'll soon teach you,' said Maurice. 'Now, Sib, make short work with those wretched—hem—I mean lovely pups, and come and put up the wickets. I've only half an hour or so to spare.'

'All right,' cried Sibbie, bestowing a parting kiss on a particularly ugly puppy she held in her arms. 'Ill run and get the things out. Shall I ask Ethel and Rhoda to come and play?'

'Rhoda's no use,' answered Maurice; 'she howls if the ball even touches her petticoats; and no doubt Ethel is dancing attendance upon her.'

'Well, I'll see,' said Sibbie, as she ran off.

'Can Sibbie play cricket well?' asked Milly. 'She's too little to hold a bat, I should have thought.'

'Oh no, not she; but of course it's mere child's play. I don't call it cricket,' answered Maurice somewhat contemptuously. 'However, she likes it so much, and she's

such a jolly little thing, such a regular stunner, I never mind playing with her.'

'Do you like her better than the others?' asked Milly.

'Oh, I don't know about that. I like them all, except perhaps Rhoda. She's so awfully slow; but then she is very delicate, and I suppose that's the reason. Sib is such a jolly, honest old thing, no one can help liking her; but of course she isn't so much of a companion to me as Olive or Hilda. They ride with me— By-the-bye, can you ride?'

Milly's eyes brightened as she replied, 'I should think so. I like it better than anything else.'

'Hurrah! that's jolly. Have you got your pony here?'

'No; but I'm going to have it. Herbert means to send it me directly he gets home. It's such a darling; and what do you think I've called it?'

'I don't know. Some stupid sentimental name, I suppose—Selim or Elfin.'

'No—Grandpapa.'

'What an odd name for a pony! What made you choose it?'

'Oh, you'll laugh if I tell you.'

'Never mind, fire away.'

'Does that mean go on?'

Maurice nodded assent.

'Well, then, there are two odious little stuck-up girls who live near us at home, and when I used to go and see them, they were always bringing different things to show me, saying, "Grandpapa gave me this, and grandpapa gave us that, because we were such good girls. You haven't got a grandpapa who gives you things; and if you had, he wouldn't give you such nice presents." And they were always talking all kinds of stuff about their grandpapa—what a

large house he lived in, and all he had for dinner—until I got quite sick of it, and one day, forgetting I had no grandfather, I said, "Oh, do be quiet, I'm tired of hearing about your grandpapa. You should see mine, he's much nicer than yours." They wouldn't believe I had one, and then I remembered that I hadn't either; but I didn't like to say I had told a story, and so I thought I would call my pony Grandpapa. I wanted a name for him very much. After that they were always teazing to know if I really had a grandpapa; and one day when they were over at Fairfield, I said "Yes," and asked them to come and see him. At first they said they weren't tidy enough (horrid prim little things!); but, after smoothing their hair and pulling out their dresses, they changed their minds. So I took them all through the house first, and then out by the back door into the stable-yard, and all the time they were asking me what my grandpapa was like. "Was he old?" I said, "No, very young; but he was quite white all over." Then they asked, "Was he ever angry?" and I said, "Only when he met a pig in the road." They thought he must be a very odd person to mind a pig. Then they asked if he ever gave me anything, and I said, "Only a lick now and then, when I gave him a lump of sugar." They called me very vulgar for saying this, and drew themselves up primly; but when I opened the stable door, and told them that I had meant my pony all the time, they were so angry—oh you can't think how angry!'

Maurice laughed heartily at Milly's story, and asked if she had played any other tricks on the little girls.

'No,' she replied. 'I told Herbert about it, and he said he didn't like me to say anything that wasn't true, even in fun, and that it wasn't kind to play tricks on other people,

especially in one's own house; so I left them alone after that. Here comes Sibbie, and Ethel and Rhoda with her.'

'I've got Ethel,' said Sybil, 'and Rhoda's going to look on, but she mustn't play.'

'Very well,' said Maurice. 'Now, where are the things? I'll put them up, and Ethel shall have the first innings.'

'I wish you would play at croquet instead,' said Rhoda. 'I could play too, then.'

'Croquet's so stupid,' said Sibbie.

'We'll have a game this afternoon, Rhoda, dear,' Ethel hastened to say; 'it would be a pity to change, now that everything is ready; besides, Maurice has only got half an hour to spare.'

'Oh, very well,' said Rhoda, turning away pettishly; 'nobody ever will do anything for me.'

Maurice shrugged his shoulders, and was about to say something sharp, when Ethel stopped him with an imploring, 'Please don't, she is not at all well to-day.'

'All right; now then, let's begin.'

Ethel was soon bowled out; and then Milly took her place, and received a lesson from Maurice how to hold the bat and to hit the ball. She was a very quick pupil, and did credit to her master's tuition before many minutes were over.

'I'll give you another lesson very soon,' he said; 'but I must be going now, or I shall keep my uncle waiting. Oh, by-the-bye, Ethel, please ask Olive to let me know if she can ride with us to-morrow at the usual time. It's her turn, I think.'

'Oh, I *am* so hungry!' exclaimed Sybil. 'I must go and ask mother for a biscuit.'

'Nonsense, Sibbie,' laughed Ethel; 'why, it is very nearly dinner time.'

'Oh, I am so glad! I never was so hungry, Ethel.'

Her sister laughed. 'So you say every day;' and turning to Milly, she added, 'Sibbie is always hungry, even directly after dinner.'

'Yes; some day, I believe, she'll eat her kittens,' said Rhoda, who had joined them again.

'Oh, for shame, Rhoda, you are very unkind to say such a thing,' said the aggrieved Sybil, the tears starting to her eyes at the barbarous idea.

'You had better come in with us and get ready for dinner,' suggested Ethel.

'Yes, it will take some time to scrub off all that dirt,' added Rhoda, and between them they contrived to land her at the nursery door, where nurse pounced upon her, and forthwith administered a severe dose of soap and water.

In the afternoon Millicent went for a long drive with Mrs. Russell, Olive, and Herbert, which she enjoyed very much; and her first day was thus brought to a satisfactory close.

CHAPTER IX.

RHODA IN TROUBLE.

LESSONS were begun again on the following day, and Millicent petitioned, of her own accord, to be allowed to join the schoolroom party at once, instead of waiting until the end of the week, as Mrs. Russell had proposed. Herbert was glad she had so chosen, as he was thus able to form some idea, before leaving Samborough, as to how she would get on with Miss Carey and her French master. Neither of them had a fault to find with her: she was somewhat backward, but both intelligent and industrious; and instead of her lessons being any longer a perpetual misery to her, they appeared everything that was pleasant. In short, Millicent seemed to have turned over a new leaf, and when the time arrived for his return home, Mr. Grant felt he could leave the bright happy little girl with feelings of the greatest comfort. Nevertheless it cost her a great many tears to part with the brother she loved so dearly. Still, when he asked if she was quite content to remain at Samborough, she answered unhesitatingly, 'Oh yes, quite; she was very happy indeed, and didn't want to go away; only she wished he could stay too.' Herbert kissed away her tears, telling her that Christmas would soon come, when she would see him

again, and that, meanwhile, he should expect a great many letters, which he promised faithfully to answer; and so he left her in tears and in smiles, like an April day of the olden times.

It was Ethel's afternoon for riding; but she begged her father to take out Milly instead, as she thought it would prevent her fretting about her brother's departure. Milly was charmed at the idea; but scarcely liked taking the pony away from Ethel, who however seemed, and really was, perfectly pleased to give up her ride to her cousin.

'Oh, how I wish I wasn't so stupid!' said Hilda, with a deep sigh, that same afternoon to Miss Carey, with whom she was sitting, out of school hours, preparing a German exercise for her master.

'I didn't know you were stupid,' said her governess, smiling. 'I know you are very industrious.'

'I must be stupid, or everything wouldn't be so much more difficult to me than to the others. Why, I don't believe Rhoda would give you as much trouble as I am now doing, Miss Carey; she would understand these rules twice as quickly.'

'Nonsense,' answered Miss Carey; 'you will understand them perfectly in a little while. Every one isn't blessed with the same quickness of apprehension, and you may have less than your sisters; but when you do learn a thing, it is in a thorough manner, and you don't forget easily.'

'No; but I know so little compared to Olive; and then—then—I—'

'Never mind the German this afternoon, dear,' said Miss Carey, putting the books aside; 'I don't think you are quite in the mood for it. Tell me, instead, what you are troubling your little head about, will you?'

Hilda's eyes filled with tears. 'I'm afraid you'll think me very silly and envious; but I'm not that really, only I can't help wishing I could see things quickly, like Olive, and always think of exactly the right thing, like Ethel. Yesterday morning, as I lay in bed, I was wondering what I could do to give Milly a little pleasure, because I thought she would be fretting at Mr. Grant leaving her next day; and although I would have given up my ride to her directly, I never thought of that. Now Ethel wanted to give her pleasure to-day, and she thought of the right thing at once; and you saw how delighted Milly was, and how kind she thought it of Ethel.'

'I quite understand your feelings, darling,' said Miss Carey; 'but you mustn't let them get morbid, as they will, if you brood over them, and are always fancying you are not this, that, or the other. You have lived long enough to know that God hasn't made us all alike, and that although we should be always striving to be better than we are, still we must, in some things, be content to remain as He has made us. Many people neglect what they have, in striving after what they have not, than which there can be no greater mistake. If you are not as clever as Olive in one way, or as clear-sighted as Ethel in another, you mustn't make yourself miserable about it. You may have other gifts they don't possess; but even if not, you must be content that it should be so.'

'Yes; of course I don't mind their being nicer than I am; but it is so hard always to fail in everything: whatever I do it's the same thing. I'm always behind the others, not only in lessons, but in play as well. I can't ride, or work, or play croquet, or do anything well. Even Bully is against me; he is already tamer with Milly than he ever was

with me; and if she goes on teaching him, I really think he will soon learn to pipe, and he never would have done it for me!'

Miss Carey could scarcely help smiling at Hilda's tone of genuine distress at the ungrateful conduct of her bullfinch, as she replied, 'Well, my dear little girl, I can't help thinking you are making mountains out of mole-hills. Even suppose everything you say is granted, it only comes to this, that your sisters are cleverer than you. Well, never mind if they are, you are not loved the less; and it is far better for you than being much cleverer than any one else, and getting puffed up and conceited without any real reason for being so. You are very young as yet, remember, and as great results have been attained by perseverance as by natural genius, so don't be discouraged, only be patient, and avoid morbid thoughts; try and think of yourself as little as possible. Come, now, I've thought of something you can do better than the others.'

'Have you? What can it be?' asked Hilda.

'Why, gardening to be sure. Who has the gayest and neatest garden at Elworthy? and who brings us in the first dish of mustard and cress for tea? Isn't it always Hilda? Do you remember when Rhoda was recovering from the measles, how delighted she used to be with the nosegays from your garden? They were always the nicest, she said.'

Hilda brightened up. 'Yes, I had forgotten that; but then there is no skill in gardening, only trouble.'

'Oh! I beg your pardon. There is a great deal of skill required: some people sow seeds that never come up, and their plants die from no apparent cause or reason, but, in reality, from want of skill. I know, when I was a child, I never could get my garden into nice order, and yet I took

a good deal of trouble with it.' In this way Miss Carey brought Hilda back to her usual serenity, and before rejoining her sisters she was quite herself again.

In the course of the evening Miss Carey read the following little poem to her, and Hilda was so pleased with it that she asked if she might copy it out, and learn it by heart :—

Disappointment.[1]

I.

All round the rolling world, both night and day,
A ceaseless noise ascends from those who pray—
'Thy will be done on earth, as now in heaven,
Unto our souls a perfect choice be given.'

II.

All round the rolling world, both night and day,
A ceaseless answer comes to those who pray—
'By shattered hopes, crossed plans, and fruitless pains,
Thine heavenly Master thine allegiance trains.'

III.

Guessing some portion of His great design,
Thou seek'st to forward it by ways of thine.
He who the whole disposes as is meet,
Sees a necessity for thy defeat.

IV.

Yet to the faithful there is no such thing
As disappointment; failures only bring
A gentle pang, as peacefully they say,
'His purpose stands, tho' mine has passed away.'

V.

All is fulfilling, all is working still,
To teach thee flexibility of will.

[1] C. Noel.

To great achievement let thy wishes soar,
Yet meek submission pleases Christ still more.

VI.

When love's long discipline is overpast,
Thy will, too, shall be done with his at last;
When all is perfected, and thou dost stand,
Robed, crowned, and glorified at His right hand.

A few days later arrived Milly's own little steed, Grandpapa, an event which caused considerable excitement among the children, to whom she had been very generous in her offers of lending it. And when the time came, she was as good as her word.

'I shall only ride every other day, Uncle Frank,' she said; 'one of the others can have Grandpapa alternate days, and then I shan't have so many more rides than they.'

But Mr. Russell would not let her make this unselfish proposition into a rule. 'You can lend your pony, dear, as often as you like,' he said; 'but the children mustn't get into the habit of thinking that they have as much right to it as you.'

Milly, however, persisted in her resolve, and what is more, never, even under the most tempting circumstances, repented her generosity. Olive, remembering her remarks to Hilda on the sands, before leaving Elworthy, felt more than ever ashamed of them. Had Millicent been in her case, how differently, and how much more generously, would she not have spoken! And as these thoughts passed through her mind, away went Olive, who was never happy until she had made a clean breast of everything, to find Milly, to whom she told all she had said, and how repentant she now felt for her foolish, ungenerous thoughts.

Milly laughed and kissed her, and from that time they got on much better together than they had hitherto done; for, of all her cousins, Olive was perhaps the only one to whom Milly did not feel especially drawn. One morning, when she had been at Samborough about a month, Maurice Clive came in, bearing an invitation from his uncle, for the five eldest girls and Milly, to spend the day with him on the following Monday, which was his birthday. Permission was willingly given, and the children, to whom a visit to Stanton Hall was a great treat, as well as an unusual event, were in perfect ecstasies at the idea.

'It is such a beautiful place, Milly!' said Hilda, as they were taking their morning walk. 'I've been there once with mamma, and Mr. Clive took us for a walk in the gardens, and gave us some roses—such lovely ones! The drawing-room was filled with beautiful pictures, china, and books; and Maurice says there are other rooms quite as beautiful in the house.'

'But why have you been there so seldom?' asked Milly. 'Maurice is very often here.'

'Yes,' replied Olive; 'but his uncle has been in very bad health, and it is only quite lately that he has had any children at the house. Maurice has a great many friends about here, or he would have led a very dull life in his play-hours, as he could have no companions at home.'

'Is his uncle well now, then?'

'He's much better; and I suppose he thinks six girls won't make too much noise for him.'

'I hope he won't be disappointed in his expectations,' said Miss Carey, smiling. 'Six girls can make more noise than he imagines, perhaps.'

Milly laughed. 'Yes, if Sibbie and I are two of the six.

But, Miss Carey, I'm getting quieter now, I'm sure; I don't bang the door so often now, do I?'

'No, dear, you have been very good in trying to cure yourself of being noisy. I often think of what poor Miss Horne must have suffered though, Milly, if she had weak nerves.'

Milly sighed. 'Oh dear! I'm afraid I was very naughty to her; but she has got two such pattern little girls now, and she is so happy with them. I had a letter from her to-day.'

'Miss Carey,' asked Olive, 'didn't something very dreadful happen to poor Mr. Clive, a long time ago? wasn't his wife drowned in Loch Lomond?'

'Not only his wife, but his five children also,' replied her governess. 'It happened about ten years ago, and he has never been the same man since.'

'How dreadful!' said Olive. 'Was he with them?'

'No; they had gone for a sail by themselves, with the boatmen they usually employed, and were returning to shore when a sudden squall came on. The children were frightened, and instead of sitting still, began jumping up and down; the boat was upset, and all who were in it perished, with the exception of one boatman, who managed to reach the shore.'

'Oh, how fearful for poor Mr. Clive! I wonder it didn't kill him too.'

'It very nearly did; but he had still one tie left him,—his sister Miriam, who had been a confirmed invalid from her childhood. She had been unable even to leave her bedroom for a number of years, and it was only the great affection he bore her, and the knowledge of the dreadful blank his absence would cause in her already joyless life,

that enabled him to endure the thought of returning to live at Stanton. Four years ago she was mercifully released from her sufferings, and although no one who loved her could wish her to live, still her death was a great grief to her brother, and made him feel that he was now quite alone in the world. Very soon after, however, Maurice's mother died, leaving him also alone in the world, and Mr. Clive, on hearing of it, immediately determined to adopt the boy, and, as you know, he has been like a father to him ever since.'

'How well you know all about them, Miss Carey!' said Olive.

'Yes, dear; Mr. Clive was a very old friend of my father's, and it was through him that I came to live with you.'

'And did you know his poor invalid sister?'

'Yes, very well indeed. I have often stayed at Stanton as a child; and some of my happiest moments were spent by Miriam's bedside. She had the happiest, brightest spirit I ever knew; and the society of children was her greatest pleasure, until she became too ill to bear them about her. Her room was full of curious and interesting things, and she was always having something fresh given her; for all who knew her loved her, and tried to put a little brightness into her life. I have heard that Mr. Clive keeps her room exactly the same as it was in her lifetime. He has never allowed a single thing to be altered in it, or taken away.'

'How I should like to see it!' said Olive. 'I wonder if Maurice ever has. I shall ask him on Monday.'

She did so, and he replied, 'No; his uncle had often told him he should see Aunt Miriam's room, but up to the present time he had not done so.'

'Couldn't you ask him to let us see it to-day?' suggested

Olive; but Maurice shook his head, and said he was afraid the request would give him pain. Before the day was over, however, Olive's wish was gratified, and it happened in this way:—

The children had amused themselves for some time out of doors with croquet, and different games, and were thinking what their next amusement should be, when one of them proposed a game of hide-and-seek in-doors. Mr. Clive very good-naturedly gave them full permission to roam over every part of the house, only excepting his library and bedroom. The children took it in turns to hide in pairs—Olive and Maurice, Hilda and Ethel, Milly and Rhoda; poor Sibbie, as usual, was the odd one; but it didn't matter, she said, she would just as soon hide by herself.

It had come to Milly and Rhoda's turn. 'Follow me,' whispered the latter; 'I know a splendid place, where they will never find us;' and, on leaving the gallery, where the others were to wait for the three minutes' start given to the hiders, she turned to the left, down another corridor, and pointing to a heavy curtain at the end of it, said, 'Let's get behind it.'

'Perhaps there won't be room,' said Milly; but on pushing the curtain aside they saw a red baize door, with a key in it. Rhoda tried the handle, but the door was fastened. 'It's locked,' said Milly. 'Come away, quick, Rhoda.'

But Rhoda had turned the key, and was opening the door.

'No, no,' said Milly, 'we mustn't go in. Come away, Rhoda, do. I'm sure Mr. Clive wouldn't like us to go into any locked-up room.'

At that moment the others were heard in full pursuit.

'Hush, don't speak, Milly; they'll hear us. Come in, there's no harm, as the key is here,' whispered Rhoda

hurriedly, and, taking hold of her cousin's dress, she pushed the door open very gently, and pulled her in after her.

Millicent, displeased at this unceremonious treatment, was about to say something sharp, but, on looking up, the words died away on her lips, and all she could exclaim was, 'Oh, what a beautiful room! Rhoda! Rhoda! do look, do! Oh, this must be the invalid sister's room, that Miss Carey was telling us about.'

A pleasanter apartment could scarcely be imagined. It was square in shape, and facing the two large windows was a deep recess, in which stood a small brass bedstead, with curtains of the freshest white muslin, looped up with green satin ribbon. The walls were hung with pictures of all kinds, chiefly beautiful water-colour drawings, representing some of the sunniest and brightest scenes of southern lands. There were statuettes in marble, alabaster, and terra cotta; copies of gems at Rome, Florence, and Naples, standing on carved wood or Dresden china brackets; book-cases filled with brightly-bound books, photographs of celebrated pictures, while, on the mantel-shelf and numerous tables, were a profusion of ornaments and pretty little nick-nacks of every kind and description. In one window stood a wardian case of ferns, in the other a gilt basket filled with the choicest flowers, and hanging from the ceiling was a blue and white candelabra of Dresden china.

'This can't be a bedroom,' said Rhoda, looking round with wondering and admiring eyes. 'It's the most beautiful drawing-room I ever saw; and oh, how deliciously soft the carpet is, Milly; it's just like walking on moss!'

'Yes; but come away, Rhoda; we really mustn't stay. I'm sure Mr. Clive wouldn't like us to be here without his leave; come, dear.'

But Rhoda refused. 'No; now we are here, we may as well look at all these lovely things,' and she advanced farther into the room. 'Oh! Milly, do come here; here's such a funny picture of a man riding on a large cat. It must be Chinese, I should think.'

'Oh, never mind, *do* come away,' entreated Milly in a perfect agony, as Rhoda went about the room, touching first one thing, then another. 'I shall go without you. You'll break something, I know you will. Oh, Rhoda, do come; don't be so tiresome,' and she felt very much inclined to cry.

'Don't you be so silly,' returned her cousin. 'I'm coming in a minute, and I shan't break anything;' but, even as she spoke, the lid of a pretty fragile ornament she held in her hand, fell off, and, in trying to save it, she knocked down a small vase filled with violets, which stood near the edge of the table. Both were broken in pieces. 'Rhoda!' cried Milly, who was still at the door, anxiously watching her cousin's movements. 'Oh! what have you done? What shall we do?'

Rhoda turned as white as ashes, and then burst into tears.

'Come, it's no good crying,' said Milly, somewhat contemptuously, going up to her; 'we must pick up the pieces and take them to Mr. Clive.'

'No, no,' cried out Rhoda, grasping Milly's arm. 'I can't tell him, he'll be so angry, and I'm so frightened. Oh! what shall I do?'

'Of course we must tell him at once. I'll do it for you, if you like. But do come away now; what good can crying do?'

'Will you tell him? Oh, how kind of you Milly, dear!

I wish I had done as you wished,' exclaimed Rhoda as they left the room.

'And so do I,' replied her cousin, who was carrying the broken pieces of china. 'You have quite spoilt all my pleasure as well as your own. But do leave off crying,' she added impatiently; 'you'll give yourself a dreadful headache.'

'I can't help it,' sobbed Rhoda. 'I'm so—so—frigh—tened. I wish I—I—might go home. Do ask the others to come home too, Milly.'

'I don't see why they should suffer for our fault,' replied Millicent. 'But here they come, so you can ask them yourself.'

'Oh, here you are at last,' cried Olive, running to meet them. 'Where did you hide yourselves? We are quite tired with looking for you. But what's the matter? what are you crying for, Rhoda? Oh, don't, dear,' she went on as her sister's sobs increased at the question. 'It always makes you so ill to cry. What is it, Milly? do tell me?'

The others had now joined them, and were asking the same question. Millicent related what had happened. Maurice looked very blank. 'It's an awful bore,' he said. 'I never thought there was any fear of your getting into that room, as it is always locked; but I suppose the housekeeper left the key in the door by mistake to-day. I'm afraid my uncle will be a good bit put out. I suppose we must tell him, as you've broken the vase; but—'

There was an indignant cry of 'Maurice!' from all but Rhoda, who was beyond speaking.

'Of course we must tell. Do you think I shouldn't have done so, even if the vase hadn't been broken?' exclaimed

Milly; and Olive added, 'It's the room having been entered at all that Mr. Clive will most mind.'

'Well,' said Maurice, 'you needn't all fly out at me so. I didn't ask you to tell a story. I know he must be told. Come along, then, Milly, I'll see you through it. He's in the library.'

'Thank you, Maurice. You are sure you don't mind? Are you coming too, Rhoda?'

'No; I can't,' she replied, clinging closer to Olive. 'Oh, don't make me, please.'

'I think you ought,' said Hilda. 'It's rather hard on poor Milly having to do it all, for it really wasn't her fault.'

'Never mind,' said Milly. 'I only thought that, as she must see Mr. Clive some time or other, it would be better for her to get it over at once.'

Ethel joined Hilda in thinking Rhoda ought to bear her share in the unpleasant task of telling the story to Mr. Clive, but she could not succeed in persuading her to do so; and at length Milly declared she could wait no longer, or her courage would all ooze out of her finger-ends. She was just going off with Maurice when voices were heard, and the next moment, to their no small astonishment, appeared Mr. Clive, and with him, talking and laughing away, was Sibbie, whose disappearance a few minutes previously had been unnoticed by the other children.

'I've told him; it's all right,' she exclaimed, running up to Milly with a triumphant air.

'Oh, Sibbie, why didn't you tell us what you were going to do?' said Milly, not certain whether to be pleased or vexed with the little busybody.

'Oh, it's all right,' said Sibbie, carelessly, taking a huge

apple out of her pocket, and beginning to munch it. 'Rhoda didn't want to tell, and I thought it was a shame you should have to do it, and so I just ran down and told Mr. Clive exactly how it happened, and he's not angry, only a little sorry, and—'

'And very pleased with Milly for wishing to tell me about it herself,' interrupted Mr. Clive, giving the little girl a kiss. 'From Sibbie's account you were scarcely to blame in the matter; but even if you had been, your candour would have made up for it in my eyes.'

'Please, forgive Rhoda,' whispered Milly; 'she is so sorry.'

Mr. Clive went up to her, and patted her head kindly.

'My poor little girl, don't cry any more; I'm not angry with you. Another time never open any door that is locked, or let your curiosity tempt you to do what you feel is not quite right. But don't cry any more now, my dear child; Maurice's birth-day mustn't have a dismal ending. Make her dry her eyes, Olive, and then I'll tell you what you shall do. I have long wished to show Maurice his dear aunt's room; and now that the ice has been broken for me, as it were, it seems a good opportunity to show it to him this afternoon; and any of you who like to see it may come too.'

Sibbie, thrusting her half-eaten apple into her pocket, jumped up and down, and clapped her hands with delight at the idea, and the rest of the children thanked Mr. Clive warmly, but at the same time begged him not to show them the room if it would give him any pain.

Rhoda excused herself from being one of the party, saying she would rather lie down, as her head ached. Ethel offered to stay with her; but her sister said she would

rather be alone; and, accordingly, she was allowed to do as she pleased. Mr. Clive then took them into his sister's pretty little room, which more than equalled their expectations. One out of the many pretty toys which strewed the tables, especially caught Sybil's fancy. It was a little black ebony box; and, on touching a spring on one side, out jumped a tiny jewelled bird, who trilled a little song, and then flew back again into the box. Mr. Clive very good-naturedly repeated the performance three or four times to please the little girl, who laughed and clapped her hands with delight each time it occurred, until Olive was obliged to call her to order, fearing Mr. Clive would not like so much noise.

'Let her be,' he said; 'I like to hear her merry laugh; it reminds me of the time when such sounds were constantly heard in this room. Before Miriam became so weak and ill, it was her greatest pleasure to have children round her, and to make her room a bright place for them. Her spirit was as pure and joyful as theirs.'

'Did not Aunt Miriam once write a little history of her room, Uncle Frank?' asked Maurice.

'Yes, she did; and I have it now safely put away. If it would interest you children to read, I will lend it you.'

'We should like it of all things,' said Olive, 'and would take the greatest care of it.'

'You shall have the manuscript, then. It was written for my darling children, who were never tired of reading it. Remember to ask me for it before you go away; and if, after reading the letter, you would like to have another look at the room, you shall do so one day before you go back to Elworthy; and poor little Rhoda can come too. We had better go down now and see how she is.'

'And I am sure it must be nearly tea-time,' said Sibbie, with a deep sigh. 'I'm *so* hungry; I didn't eat much dinner; it wasn't nice. Why do you say hush?' turning to Olive, who, shocked at her bad manners, was trying to stop her from saying more. 'Why, mayn't I say I'm hungry, if I am?'

Poor Olive got very red, and Mr. Clive and Maurice burst out laughing at her discomfiture.

'Never mind,' said the former. 'Sibbie is privileged to say what she pleases; but why didn't somebody give her what she did like at dinner?'

'Oh, she's such a funny child,' said Hilda; 'she can't bear game. I suppose that is what she means.'

'Well, Maurice must take care that she has a good tea,' said Mr. Clive; and Maurice promised that he would, and was very indignant when Olive said that she did not deserve any for her rudeness.

'She's not rude,' he said; 'she's a dear honest old girl; and it is only a thousand pities she isn't a boy. She's quite good enough for one.'

'Or bad enough,' retorted Olive; but Maurice turned away, pretending he had not heard.

CHAPTER X.

AUNT MIRIAM'S LETTER.

MR. CLIVE did not forget to give Olive his sister's little story of her room; and before the children took leave of Maurice, it was settled that he should have tea with them on their next half-holiday, and then Miss Carey should be asked to read the letter to them afterwards.

Accordingly Maurice arrived on the following Saturday; and when tea was over, and had been cleared away, the girls, with the exception of Sybil (who never could be made even to thread a needle, and who on this occasion was, as usual, perched on Maurice's knee, holding a variety of kittens and puppies in her lap), got out their work and gathered round Miss Carey, who, seated in an arm-chair in the pleasant bow window, opened the manuscript and began to read as follows:—

'MY DEAR CHILDREN,—It is a very great grief to me, who love you all so much, to be no longer able to amuse you, or have you constantly with me, as I used to do. You know, since it has pleased God (doubtless for some good and wise purpose) to afflict me as He has done, that I can very seldom leave my bed, or undergo the exertion of talk-

ing or of having many people about me. But although I so seldom see you, my thoughts are constantly with my much-loved children, and my most earnest desire is, that you should not entirely forget your poor invalided aunt, whose chief unhappiness is the loss of your society.

'It occurred to me this morning, while looking round me, that I might yet afford you some little amusement, by writing an account of the various, and in many respects curious, objects contained in my room, which very few of you have seen since it has been altered and newly fitted up. Formerly, when much younger, I collected quite a little museum of odd-looking curiosities, and finding them invaluable in amusing the children by whom I was constantly surrounded, they were allowed to remain in the same place year after year, with now and then an addition; and they still remain, although, alas! the solitude of my room is seldom now cheered by the merry voices and bright eyes of the little ones who were at one time such constant and welcome visitors.

'And now I must recall to your minds the shape of my room. It is of a good size, with two large windows overlooking the beautiful lawn and park, on the right of which are graceful groups of beech-trees; and far away in the distance can be seen blue ridges of hills, which I remember as a child were always associated in my mind with the "Land of Promise,"—why, I cannot tell, unless it were that they seemed so far away, and to my childish ideas appeared so much nearer heaven. On the left, the towers of the dear old cathedral appear rising above the clustering trees; while gleaming here and there is the little stream which flows at the bottom of the park. Yes; it is a pleasant scene to gaze upon, and I am truly thankful to

be permitted to do so every now and then. Do you remember the recess? That is where my bed stands, half-concealed by muslin curtains. There are two doors to the room, one by which you come in, and another opposite the fire-place. And now we will suppose that you have entered the room and have advanced some steps. Turn your eyes to the other door, and allow me to introduce you to Tingtan Say Chin Chin Yeh! There he hangs in all the glory of his ugliness! Did you ever see such a ferocious-looking creature? But don't be alarmed; come a little nearer; he is not alive, you know, and can't eat you, however fierce he may look. Shall I tell you all about him? He is a Chinese mandarin of great distinction, and has on a gorgeous dress of blue, red, yellow, and green silk. His large staring eyes are not pretty, I must allow, and his dark bushy eyebrows are flying up into his forehead in the wildest possible manner. One arm is raised above his head, and in the hand is a dreadful-looking weapon, from which I fancy neither you nor I would care to have a blow. But what is that ferocious-looking animal upon which he is mounted? What dreadful green eyes it has! what a red nose! and what terrible teeth with fangs like a tiger! Surely it cannot be a cat? But yes, it must be, I declare. And behold its tail (what a length it is!) sticking out behind the mandarin's right shoulder! Whoever saw such a gigantic wicked-eyed pussy before? Not I; but then I have never been to China, and perhaps there it is the fashion to have such cats; or it may be one of a kind kept exclusively for the mandarins; at any rate, he is riding it instead of a horse. The fact is, he has just heard that another mandarin, with a longer pigtail than his own, has been seen in his dominions, and this intelligence has so

enraged him, that he is determined to go out and fight his daring rival. It is in vain that his attendants try and prevent him, by preparing the most tempting breakfast, consisting of the rarest birds' nests, the tenderest puppies stewed in oil, and the most delicious young snakes! It is of no use: casting one look of longing at the tempting food, he rushes out, mounts his fierce steed, and brandishing on high his weapon, gallops off to seek and punish the rash wearer of the pigtail! Whether he found him or not, I never heard; most likely not; at all events we will now leave him, in the hope that he returned alive to devour as good a dinner as the breakfast he was foolish enough to forego.

'Look at this picture close by in the corner, and you will see two dear little white kittens. Ah! *these* are real English pussies! They are lying on a beautiful green velvet cushion, and one is gently licking the other with his pink tongue. The little fellow having his toilet performed, is looking rather sentimentally at a portrait of a lady, which he holds in his paws. You might fancy that his mistress, to whom he is much attached, has been absent for a short time; and that, knowing she will soon return, he has said to his companion, "Lick me all over, and make me nice and white; for I wish to look very pretty!" And the other kitten has granted his request; for although he is equally pretty, and very fond of his mistress, yet he knows that his little brother is the favourite; and being a cat of an amiable disposition, and somewhat older, he stifles his own feelings of jealousy, and takes great pains to remove every speck of dirt from the other's coat. I don't think he will get the same kind attention in return, for the favoured kitten looks vain, spoilt, and lazy. It is very likely when their mistress

comes home, and they both run to meet her, that she will take up her favourite in her arms, and, while fondling him, will exclaim, "You dear little Tiny, you are always so beautifully clean, it is a pleasure to kiss you; but *you*, Mouser, look as though you had passed hours in the coal-hole!" But then, you know, we must not always expect our good deeds to be appreciated; for what would be the merit of doing good were we always to be praised for it? I dare-say poor Mouser will feel very sad and ill-used at his mistress's remark; though perhaps, on the whole, he will be happier than his spoilt little brother.

'I don't think that you would care for any of the other pictures in this part of the room, except perhaps one called "The Romp," which represents the merry, rosy face of a little girl, with a wild profusion of hair flying about in all directions. Her hand is raised to her ear as though she were listening; and I think it is very likely that she is playing a game of hide-and-seek with her brothers, who have lately come home for the holidays. From the triumphant, merry expression of her face, it would seem that she has found a hiding-place which cannot be easily discovered. Well, I only hope she will not hide herself too well, as did the poor young bride in the song of the "Mistletoe Bough."

'My toilet table, which stands between the two windows, abounds with pretty objects: candlesticks, vases, and china pots, beautifully painted with every variety of butterflies, flowers, grasses, etc.; smelling bottles—blue, white, and red—filled with delicious scents, none of which, however, can equal the sweet bunches of purple violets which are brought fresh to me every day as long as they bloom. You must give an especial look at this funny extinguisher. It is an old owl, with its head wrapped up in a night-cap. Its great

yellow goggle eyes peep out in the drollest manner possible, at the same time its enormous protruding beak gives it a grave and solemn appearance!

'And now we will pass on to this table, near the fire-place, where you will find plenty of things to examine and admire. Here are some pretty shells of all shapes and hues. Look at this paper Nautilus. It is for all the world like one of those thin coffee biscuits, and looks as if the mere touch of a fairy's finger would break it. How wonderfully constructed must the delicate creature be whose home it is! Argonauta is its Latin name, derived probably from the word Argo, the name of the ship in which Jason sailed on his celebrated expedition to recover the Golden Fleece, a story which you have doubtless often read, or heard.

'The Nautilus is a great favourite with the poets. Here are some beautiful lines from a poem by James Montgomery:—

> '"Light as a flake of foam upon the wind,
> Keel upwards from the deep emerged a shell,
> Shaped like the moon ere half her orb is filled.
> Fraught with young life, it righted as it rose,
> And moved at will along the yielding water.
> The native pilot of this little bark
> Put out a tier of oars on either side;
> Spread to the wafted breeze a twofold sail,
> And mounted up and glided down the billow,
> In happy freedom, pleased to feel the air,
> And wander in the luxury of light."

'Pope also mentions it thus:—

> '"Learn of the little Nautilus to sail,
> Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale."

'Some naturalists, however, dispute this fact, declaring

that the animal swims, but does not sail. Usually he walks about the bottom of the sea on his long arms, feeding on the marine vegetation; and when on the surface, he gathers these long arms closely together, and swims along, his round eyes keeping a sharp lookout. These large fan-like shells, whose colour, as you hold them in different lights, varies from a deep purple to a rich violet, are called pinnas. Do you see this long piece of glossy material, resembling floss silk, which hangs to them? It is their beard; and when in search of food, they throw it out on the surface of the sea, and catch small fish in its meshes. I have seen shawls made from it; and when Lord Nelson was stationed on the Sicilian coast, he had a muff presented to him, made entirely of the tufts of this beautiful beard. This pretty white, delicate shell is called Venus' Heart. It looks very brittle; I hope yours and mine are made of stronger materials! Have you ever seen the Lima shell? Here is one. It is pure white, with an orange and pink fringed lining. It is British, and lives in a little nest, made of fragments of broken coral bound together in a mass; and although rough enough on the outside to keep off enemies, is beautifully smooth and comfortable inside. Without this protection the Lima would be a tempting morsel to some prowling haddock or whiting, for its fragile shell does not more than half cover it; but He, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, has taught this little creature the art of self-preservation. What have you caught hold of now? Something that looks like barley-sugar? Well, so it does, but it wouldn't taste half so nice, I'm afraid; and if you look at it closely, you will see flies, and leaves, and all kinds of things in it, which wouldn't be good to eat at all. No, this stuff didn't come out of any confectioner's

shop, and its origin is not very clearly known; for we are speaking of amber, and whether it is a mineral or a vegetable substance, the world does not know. It is found on the sea-shore, and is also dug up from the interior of the earth. Ancient writers supposed it to be a resinous juice, which, oozing out of old pines and fir-trees, was discharged into the sea. The insects and leaves which are so often seen in the best pieces of amber, must have been enclosed in its fluid state. If you look into this piece on my table, you will see that some of these poor insects must have fought hard for their liberty, for they have left their limbs behind them in the attempt. Here is a great fat beetle with only half a leg, poor thing! Sometimes you only see legs and wings in the amber, showing that the insects escaped at the expense of these members. It has the same property as sealing-wax, of attracting other things to it, when rubbed on any cloth, or on a rough surface. Here is a case of humming-birds. How lovely is their plumage as the light falls upon it! This one, with its golden green breast, over which is thrown a rosy gloss, is very beautiful. Humming-birds cannot live in England, on account of the climate. Two or three have occasionally been brought over; but they have died almost immediately. Some of the most beautiful are inhabitants of Peru. It must be very pretty to see them hovering over beautiful bell-shaped flowers, thrusting in their long bills in search of the honey. They are passionate little birds, and very often will pull a flower to pieces, and scatter it on the ground in a fit of rage, on finding the nectar already extracted. Sometimes the silly creatures fight fiercely for the same flower, when perhaps there are numbers as sweet, and of the same kind, close at hand. This curious-looking nest be-

longs to the tailor bird. It is the most ingenious of all nests, being composed of two leaves sewn together in the shape of a pouch, open at the top. Sometimes it is a dead leaf and a living one which the bird chooses, and using its bill as a needle, sews them together with pieces of fibres. Occasionally two living leaves are chosen. See how comfortably the inside is lined with feathers and soft down! This little boot, cut out of coal, with its high heel, and tiny rows of nails, was made by a blind miner at Dudley, in Staffordshire. You would think it beautifully made, even for a person with eyes; for a blind man, it is marvellous. But God is very merciful: if He takes away one sense, He increases the power of another. In the case of this poor miner, his delicacy of touch must have been almost equivalent to sight.'

At this moment the reading was interrupted by a knock at the door, a face peeped in, and the words, 'Please, Miss Sibbie, will you come to bed?' were heard.

'Oh, bother!' exclaimed Sybil without moving. 'I can't come now, Mary Anne.'

'Yes, please, my dear, you must, as it is bath night.'

'Hurrah for the tub!' cried Maurice. 'What a pity it is that I never see you on Sundays, Sib, when you are actually clean, and have smooth hair!'

Sybil boxed his ears for his impudence, and then, Miss Carey having exerted her authority, consented to go off to bed.

'We mustn't read any more now she has gone,' said Miss Carey; 'besides, the letter is too long to finish to-night. I daresay Maurice may come again on Monday, and hear the rest of it.'

'I like it so much,' said Hilda; 'don't you, Olive?'

'Yes, immensely; and we shall look at everything in the room with so much more interest now. I hope you will go with us next time, Miss Carey.'

'I should like it very much, dear, if Mr. Clive has no objection.'

When questioned, he could give no information about his early years. His age and voice, and a certain air of ease, which showed he was no stranger to the place, established his identity in the eyes of his mother. She recognised him as her son, and his name and fortune were restored to him. In remembrance of the affair, she established an annual dinner on the 1st of May, to which all the chimney-sweepers in London were bidden. After her death this dinner was given up, and the present May-day festival instituted instead.

'On the mantel-shelf stand two large black owls, bearing candles on the top of their heads. Here is also a whole family of pug dogs: grandpapa, big and fierce; grandmamma, fat and wheezy; one young grandson scratching his ear playfully, with a merry look in his face; another sitting down as quiet and grave as a judge; for dogs have their different characteristics as well as human beings. Look at these funny little figures, who, when touched, thrust their long red tongues in and out, and twirl their heads about. In the midst of them sits an emaciated Chinese beggar woman, with long skinny bony arms. Her hair is dragged up to a knot at the very top of her head, and her eyes have such a hungry eager look in them, that one almost wishes to give her a piece of bread, so famished does she appear. She is cringing at the feet of a very grand personage, probably one of the highest mandarins in China, judging by his peacock's feather and long pigtail. From his rich apparel, he might be akin to the fierce gentleman opposite, with whom we first made acquaintance. But if he be, his countenance is a pleasing contrast; for, instead of wild, ferocious looks, we have here the most benignant of faces. His small sleepy eyes gaze placidly at you; a

quiet smile is on his lips; and his head nods to and fro, slowly and contentedly, as though to do so were the main object of his existence. *He* certainly is no autocrat.

'Ah! there is one more object to look at. Do you see that pretty plaster-cast of an infant asleep in its cradle? That was given me long, long ago by one of those pretty little Italian boys who frequent the streets of London. I had bought two or three figures one day from the carriage window; and a day or two later, while I was waiting outside a shop, the same boy again passed by. "Ah! signorina, buy from me; me so cold, so hungry!" But having no money with me, I could only shake my head, and refuse his piteous request. He looked very mournfully at me for a moment; then, as if suddenly remembering that I had not refused his petition on a former occasion, he selected this little figure from the rest, placed it in my hand, with a bright smile and a "grazie," and the next moment had disappeared among the crowd of carriages. I always pity these little Savoyards so much. Some of them have very cruel masters, who beat and half starve them, if they do not bring back a certain sum of money at the end of the day. Perhaps, however, the organ boys are the most to be pitied, for they get abuse on all sides,—from the public, as well as from their employers.

'I pass by my book-shelves, whose silent occupants are the much-loved companions of my solitude. When you are older, I hope you will like them as much as I do. A very clever man has said, "If I were to pray for a taste which should stand me in stead under every variety of circumstances, and be a source of happiness to me through life, however things might go amiss, and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. Give a man this taste, and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail to

make a happy man, unless, indeed, you put into his hands a most perverse selection of books."

'There are many pictures within the recess; one is a photograph of that beautiful painting by Murillo, "The Assumption of the Virgin Mary." How divine is the expression of her face, as she gazes up to heaven! and how lovely are those little cherubs nestling at her feet!

'I have yet to describe the ornaments on the table which stands in the centre of the room. The first object that attracts your eye is the model of a camel, magnificently adorned with feathers, ribbons, lace, and precious stones. He bears a pavilion on his back, covered with green silk, embossed with gold and silver letters. Every year the Great Turk sends beautiful carpets from Cairo to Mecca, to cover Mahomet's temple, and this camel is the one who holds the office of carpet carrier.

'After he has made the journey, he is considered too sacred an animal to work any more, and is kept in a stable for the remainder of his life. Camels are capable of undergoing great fatigue, and march sometimes for days and nights through the vast deserts of Arabia, almost without stopping, and with very little food or drink. They are also used in Turkey; and, when old and past work, are treated with the utmost humanity; for the Turks never allow old servants to be deserted, although age and sickness may prevent them from being of further use. They may either bask in the sun's rays, or browse in the shade, at their pleasure; and the children of the village are taught to venerate them on account of their old age and past services.

'Many people are under the impression that the difference between the camel and dromedary is that the former has one hump and the latter two. This is a mistake.

There is a breed of camels in some parts of Asia, called the Bactrian camel, that has two humps; but the dromedary, in Africa and Arabia, is to the camel what the riding horse in Europe is to the cart horse, merely a lighter and higher bred animal. Another mistake is that camels are so remarkably patient and docile. Much like horses, some are vicious by nature, though, as a general rule, they are tame enough when they have hard work and hard living in the desert. The town camels, highly fed to enable them to carry heavy loads for short distances, are often very savage, and obliged to be muzzled. No beast has a less gentle appearance than an old camel in a rage. He looks frightful when he roars and opens his mouth, displaying teeth long enough for the largest tiger.

'Among many anecdotes told me by people well acquainted with their habits, I remember one of a camel, who, for some reason best known to himself, attacked a Turkish soldier in Nubia. A low hut with a very low entrance happening to be near, the man made a dash for it; and, reaching it barely in time, flattered himself he was safe from his pursuer. To his horror, however, the huge brute deliberately knelt down and crawled in after him on his knees. The soldier had no weapon but a long pistol, which he fired at the camel's head. The ball glanced from his cheek, with no other effect than to make him still more savage as he went on, a perfect picture of fury, and to tinge with blood the flakes of foam which he spluttered all about him. The soldier defended himself for some time, striking him on the nose with the butt of his pistol, till at last the camel caught the weapon in his mouth. Happily the man had the presence of mind to seize him at that moment by a ring in his nostril. For a second the brute seemed cowed;

then, suddenly dashing up his head with a loud roar, he freed himself by tearing his own nostrils, and again attacked the soldier, who, with his now broken pistol, would have had small chance of escape, but for the arrival of two of his comrades, accompanied by the owner of the camel, and some other Arabs, who mastered the animal very cleverly by throwing a cloth over his head.

'Under this glass shade is a set of very handsome ivory chessmen. Chess is a game of great antiquity, and no one knows exactly by whom it was invented. Most likely, however, it came from the Hindoos. There are a great many legends with regard to the origin of this delightful game. I will tell you one:—It is said that immediately after the invasion of Alexander the Great, there reigned in India a king called Kaid, who was passionately fond of war, and who always proved victorious over his enemies. In the course of time there was no one who could or would fight with him, and in consequence all war was at an end. The poor king became very wretched, for peace was intolerable to him; and so it happened that while all his people were happy and prosperous, he lost pleasure in everything, and looked upon death as his only relief. One day he sent for a wise minister of his, called Sassa, and told him all his trouble,—how he could think and dream of nothing but battles and war, and how, not having one single enemy to overcome, and not choosing to go to war without cause, he was sick and tired of life. Sassa requested permission to retire and think over what could be done for his sovereign. He had heard of a wonderful game, recently introduced into India by Alexander and his soldiers, which was an exact image of war, such as might be carried on between two kings. This was chess. Sassa immediately sent messengers

abroad in search of the chess-board and men, and being very clever, soon learnt the moves of the pieces, and the nature of the game. But before taking it to the king, he simplified it by reducing the number of pieces to thirty-two, and making the game less difficult in various ways.

'The king was so delighted with his new pastime that he speedily recovered his spirits, and gave up all thoughts of war and bloodshed, contenting himself with the charms of his mimic battle-field. It is said that the wise Sassa was paid in the following way: one grain for the first square of the chess-board, two for the next, four for the third, and so on, reaping a good harvest by the time the squares were exhausted.

Ivory is obtained, as no doubt you know, from the tusks of the elephant. In Ceylon these animals are usually shot; but in Africa they are speared to death. An elephant hunt is said to be most exciting sport; but I should be very sorry to see one, for the poor creatures are great favourites of mine, and, if well treated, are so docile and affectionate. If provoked, they are capable of returning the insult with tenfold interest. There is a story told of a driver who broke a cocoa nut against his elephant's head, a piece of wanton cruelty for which he was well punished. Next day, when the animal was passing through the street, he saw some cocoa nuts put out for sale. Taking up one with his trunk, he beat it about the driver's head until the unfortunate man was quite killed. The Hindoos call a hurricane an elephant, on account of its force. The African elephants have extraordinarily large ears. Dr. Livingstone says he has seen a native creep under one, so as to be quite covered from the rain. It must have been a very small native, I should fancy! It is said that elephants, when they feel

death approaching, retire to die where others of their kind have died before them. In other words, they are gregarious in death.

'What funny nodding figures these are! The old countryman, his wife with her spade and basket of potatoes, and the ancient dame with spectacles on nose, who is seated in a comfortable arm-chair, with her cat purring at her feet. Give their heads a touch: there they go, nid, nid, nodding! Open that pretty white egg, half hidden in its golden nest. Ah! what have you found? A little green frog? I thought so. It is in imitation of those green tree frogs, so common in the south of France, who keep you awake at night with their unmusical croakings. It is possible to frighten them into silence, I believe, by placing a lighted candle where they can see it. They will then become as silent as mice. Naturalists say common frogs will eat snails, shells and all; but this I can hardly believe.

'Oh! take care of that creeping crocodile! He has a tail long and stiff enough to have been the creature who carried off the poor woman's child in Southey's poem, "The King of the Crocodiles." Do you remember the story? How the poor woman lost her child, and begged the man to take her in his boat to the island where the king reigned? A tradition among the people in Upper Egypt says, "that there is a king of the crocodiles who has ears, but no tail," and who, unlike most kings, can do no harm. The man, however, refused to comply with the poor mother's request, but agreed to lend her his boat, and in it she floated down the stream to his majesty's dominions. He was seated upon the eggs, and around him crawled the young prince crocodiles. The woman fell down on her knees, and told her tale of woe, demanding vengeance for her boy. She added,

'"I know that you, sire, never do wrong;
You have no tail so stiff and strong;
You have no tail to strike and slay,
But you have ears to hear what I say."

'And the answer was—

'"You have done well," the king replies,
And fixed on her his little eyes.
"Good woman, yes, you have done right,
But you have not described me quite.

I have no tail to strike and slay,
And I have ears to hear what you say;
I have teeth, moreover, as you may see,
And I will make a meal of thee."

'But the cruel king's boast was a vain one, as he soon found to his cost; for he "missed his bite." And the woman, without more ado, took him by the legs and "trundled him off the eggs of the queen." The queen, I must tell you, was "gadding abroad." Then the woman caught hold of six of the young princes, and thrust the head of one into the throat of the other, so that "each prince crocodile choked his brother." She carried them off with her in the boat, and made the best of her way home again. And what do you think the queen said when she returned home, and found all her eggs broken, and her six darling princes missing? Oh! she was so angry with the king:

'"Is this your care of the nest?" cried she;
"It comes of your gadding abroad," said he.

Fortunately for the poor king, the queen was contented with words. Being well aware that *she* had a tail as well as a tongue, he thought it best to be mute, "while a terrible

peal in his ears she rung." Meanwhile, the woman was very well pleased, as she had amply revenged the death of her son. She called all her neighbours together, and gave them a funeral supper, and

> ' " They all agreed that revenge was sweet,
> And young prince crocodiles delicate meat."

'And now, my dear children, with this story, I think my letter must end, for I am getting tired of writing. I hope it may have given you some little pleasure, and if so, perhaps you may be inclined, some future day, to take another peep into Aunt Miriam's room.'

CHAPTER XII.

NEWS FOR MILLY.

'HOW fast the time has gone since I came here!' said Millicent to her aunt one December morning, as they were standing together at the window, watching the light flakes of snow fall to the ground. 'Why, it is nearly three months!'

'You must be longing to see Herbert again,' said Mrs. Russell. 'We shall miss you dreadfully, though, when you go; every one of us in different ways.'

'And how I shall miss all of you!' said Milly. 'I can't help liking to go back again to dear Fairfield; but I wish we were all going in a body. I expect it will be rather dull, sometimes, when Herbert is out shooting.'

Mrs. Russell had thought so too, and was not quite happy at the idea of the month Milly was to spend at Fairfield. She knew well enough that Herbert would spare no pains to make her happy, and that he would be with her as much as possible; but, of course, he would have other things to think of besides, and the little girl would of necessity be left to herself a great deal. This would not be good for her in any way, and after three months' constant companionship with other children, Mrs. Russell knew that any child, and

particularly one of so sociable a disposition as Milly, would feel very dull on being suddenly thrown on her own resources. She was still thinking over the matter, when True ran into the room in her capacity as postwoman, exclaiming, 'Such a big fat letter for 'oo to-day, Mammy!' and, on taking it from the little one's hand, Mrs. Russell saw that it was from Herbert Grant. Enclosed was a note for Milly. 'What's that for?' thought Mrs. Russell, as she put it aside; 'and what can this letter to me be about?' She soon learnt; for Mr. Grant, going at once to the point, told her that he was engaged to be married, and that he wanted her to tell the news to Milly before giving her his note. He then went on to say that he was engaged to a Mrs. Neville, a young widow with a little boy eight years of age. The acquaintance was a short one, having only begun the night of Milly's memorable visit to Mrs. Dickson. Mrs. Neville was then staying with the Marshes, where Herbert had met her at dinner. Mr. Grant gave a charming description of her, and wound up by saying that the marriage was not to take place till February, and that meanwhile Mrs. Neville, her child, and her mother, Mrs. Leigh, were to spend Christmas with him at Fairfield. 'It will be,' he wrote, 'a good opportunity for Milly to make her acquaintance, and little Harry will be an amusement to her. As, however, I fear she will in any case feel dull without her cousins, I wish I could persuade you to let one of them accompany her to Fairfield. I leave the choice entirely to you and Milly.'

Mrs. Russell carried the letter to her husband. 'What! Herbert going to be married?' he exclaimed, as he read it; 'and to a widow with a boy! I'm sorry he is to have another child to plague him again so soon, and it's sure to be

a spoilt one. Hum! well, this seems rather a sudden affair, Mary?'

'To us, perhaps,' replied Mrs. Russell; 'but I suppose it has been going on some time. I don't think Herbert would choose any one who isn't very nice; but I am sorry, too, about the boy. However, he will soon be going to school. I am very glad of this news for one thing, which is that now Milly will not be so much alone at Fairfield. What do you say to one of the girls going with her, as Herbert proposes?'

'Well, of course I would rather we should be all together at Christmas; but as matters now stand at Fairfield, I think poor Milly will want a companion more than ever, as I don't suppose she will have much of Herbert's society, and Master Harry will most probably turn out more of a torment than an amusement.'

'What a shame,' said Mrs. Russell, smiling, 'to make up your mind that the child is spoilt! Well, I'll go and break the news to Milly now, and we can settle afterwards which bairn to send.'

Mrs. Russell opened the schoolroom door, and asked Miss Carey to excuse Millicent for half an hour, as she had something to say to her.

'Have you heard from Herbert, Aunt Mary?' asked the little girl anxiously. 'I thought I should have had a letter.'

'I have one for you, darling; but before you read it I must tell you some news—very pleasant news, I hope you will think: Herbert is going to be married.'

'Herbert going to be married!' exclaimed Milly. 'Oh, Aunt Mary, I'm so glad! Now he won't be obliged to live all by himself in that large house. Only I hope it's to some

one very nice. What is her name, Aunt Mary? Please give me the letter that I may see what he says.'

And, in a great state of excitement, she opened her brother's letter, and read as follows:—

'MY DARLING LITTLE MILLY,—I wonder what you will say when you hear that I am going to be married—going to give you a sister, one whom I hope you will love very much indeed, and who will, I am sure, love my little Milly *almost* as much as I do! Agnes has heard so much about you that she is longing to see you, and so has promised to spend Christmas with us at Fairfield, with her mother and her little boy Harry. Only fancy, Milly, how funny it will be to have a brother and a nephew rolled up in one, for he will be both in a kind of way; and he already talks of Aunt Milly, and wonders if she will play at horses with him, and hopes she won't be a "stupid stuck-up girl, with no fun in her!" I've relieved his mind on that score, you may be sure. I am longing to see you, darling, and to show you to Agnes, and I hope we shall have a very happy, merry Christmas; but I think you will enjoy yourself all the more if you have one of your cousins with you, and I have therefore written to ask Mrs. Russell to let one of them accompany you. I hope she will say yes. Many thanks for sending me on your last Indian letter. By this time mamma must have had yours, describing your new happy life. I wonder what they will say to my news!—Ever your affectionate brother,

'HERBERT GRANT.'

'Well, Milly,' said Mrs. Russell, as she finished reading her letter.

'Oh! Aunt Mary, it's all very jolly, I think; and what a nice letter from Herbert, isn't it? And oh! how delicious

it will be if you will let one of the girls go with me to Fairfield! Do say yes, dear Aunt Mary!'

Mrs. Russell kissed her, and said 'Yes' very willingly. 'But which of them shall it be, Milly?' she added.

This was rather a puzzling question.

'I would rather you chose the one, Aunt Mary,' said Milly, after a moment's thought.

'Well, it must be one of the three eldest,' replied Mrs. Russell. 'I must think the matter over, and decide the knotty point before post-time.'

'May I go now and tell the others all about it?' asked Milly; 'and may we have a half-holiday in honour of the news?'

Her aunt said 'Yes' to both questions, and away flew Milly back to the schoolroom in a state of the wildest excitement. Her information produced quite as much sensation as she had expected; the children could talk and think of little else, so that Miss Carey, seeing plainly that the lessons would suffer, made a virtue of necessity, and gave them a whole holiday instead of the promised half-holiday.

At dinner, however, Mrs. Russell remarked that Milly's eyelids were red and swollen, and that her face was no longer the joyful one of the morning. She took no notice at the time; but when dinner was over, she called her into the drawing-room, and asked what had happened to upset her. The little girl burst into tears.

'What is it, my darling?' said Mrs. Russell, putting her arm round her; and then Milly poured out her sorrows. The children had been talking together over Herbert's marriage, and it seemed that Olive had said she wondered at Milly for being so delighted about it, and when asked her reason, had replied—

'Because, of course, you can't expect him to be as fond of you now, or to take as much notice of you.'

'I don't see that,' said Milly; 'having two more people to love won't make him love me any the less.'

'Oh yes, it will,' answered Olive. 'You'll see what I mean when you go back.'

And then, for the mere fun of teazing, she went on to make some very foolish remarks on sisters-in-law, how disagreeable they sometimes were, and what a plague Milly would find little Harry, etc. etc., until she succeeded in making the poor child as thoroughly uncomfortable as she had before been happy; for it had never entered her head to look at the subject in this light. She was so thoroughly prepared to love Agnes and little Harry with her whole heart, that it never occurred to her that they might not care for her in the same way. Olive was sorry for what she had done, when she saw the effect her injudicious words had produced; but it was then too late to efface the impression they had made on her cousin's mind. A few kind, sensible words, however, from her aunt soon undid the mischief; and Milly went up to her own room to write to Herbert, with her old full faith and trust in him and his love quite re-established.

'Please don't scold Olive,' she said to her aunt. 'I oughtn't to have been so silly as to have let her make me miserable; I know, now, that she was only teazing me.'

But it was a kind of teazing of which Mrs. Russell very much disapproved, and she spoke very seriously to Olive on the subject, and made her see how wrong she had been to talk to her little cousin in the way she had done.

'I had thought of letting you go with her to Fairfield,' she said; 'but I can't do so now, as it might lead to more

mischief being made there through this foolish love of teazing.'

'Oh no, mamma!' exclaimed Olive; 'indeed I wouldn't say another word for the world. Still,' she added humbly, 'I think I had better not go, as I know Milly would rather have Hilda or Ethel with her.'

'It would be rather hard on you to lose Hilda at Christmas time,' replied Mrs. Russell; 'so we will decide that Ethel shall go;' and, accordingly, it was so settled, much to Milly's delight and Rhoda's discontent.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGNES AND HARRY.

MR. Russell travelled with the little girls as far as London, where Herbert met them, and took charge of them for the remainder of the journey. Milly's delight at again seeing her brother was unbounded, and he seemed quite as much pleased to have her by his side once more, and to see her looking so well and happy. The journey to Fairfield was all too short for the excited little woman, who had so much both to hear and to tell. Her tongue never ceased for one instant, and Herbert thought she would be quite worn out before she arrived at her destination; but the nearer they got to Fairfield the higher her spirits rose, and it was not until they were quite close to the house that she began to feel shy at the thought of the new faces she was to see. But when, on driving up to the house, she caught sight of Jane and Mary waiting at the door to receive her, their faces beaming with pleasure, this feeling was quickly driven away, and the next moment she was giving them a warm greeting, and asking after every one and everything about the place in the same breath.

Meanwhile Herbert had taken Ethel into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Neville was sitting. 'Oh! here you are,'

she cried, springing up from her chair to meet them. 'I thought you would never come; but where's Milly? This is Ethel, I'm sure, from the description.'

'Yes, this is Ethel; Milly is in the hall, asking a hundred thousand questions, and so— Oh, here she comes. Well, Milly, now for this formidable introduction; here's Agnes—'

'Longing to see little Milly,' interrupted Mrs. Neville, giving her a warm kiss. 'Herbert's an old teaze, isn't he, Milly? I'm sure you won't find me very formidable.'

'Are you really Agnes?' asked Milly, looking up in some surprise at Mrs. Neville. 'You look so young; and how pretty you are!'

Herbert burst out laughing. 'My dear Milly, spare Agnes's blushes. Did you think I was going to marry an old fright?'

'No; but I didn't think Agnes would look so very—very—so exactly like a young lady, I mean,' said Millicent, in whose imagination the mother of a boy eight years old was pictured as a much more staid and dignified person than the slight, girlish-looking figure before her.

'You thought I should wear caps and mittens, and perhaps spectacles, didn't you?' said Agnes, laughing and blushing.

'No, of course not,' exclaimed Milly indignantly; 'as if Herbert would like that! But I'm so glad you are so nice-looking, I am really.'

There was a general laugh at Milly's *naiveté*, and then a great noise as of stamping and running was heard outside. 'Oh, that must be Harry,' said Mrs. Neville. 'I'll call him in;' but before she could reach the door, it was flung open very wide, and a boy's shrill voice cried out, 'Out of the

way, good people; make room for the favourite of the Derby. She's being exercised, and she's very skittish. So ho! now, my lady, gently, gently;' and, to Milly's and Ethel's no small surprise, in ran a little old lady, with a profusion of white curls, followed by Master Harry, who was driving her with red reins fastened round her arms. 'Oh, mamma! oh, Harry!' exclaimed Agnes reproachfully; but neither horse nor driver took any notice of her words, and the latter called out, 'Now, Silverhair, let's see your paces; gee up!—that's right, so ho! my lady, not too fast, mind the chairs;' then, in an undertone, 'kick up, Grandmamma.' His horse did so, and then, on being told to rear, obeyed the command in the funniest manner possible.

No one could help laughing; but Agnes at once put a stop to the proceedings, and as she unharnessed her mother, said, 'Oh, mamma, why *do* you spoil this child so? The idea of his making you his horse! Harry, you mustn't do it again.'

Harry laughed mischievously, and, looking at Ethel and Milly, said, 'What jolly fun! I can drive tandem now!'

'Don't scold him, dear,' said Mrs. Leigh, still panting from her late exertions; 'I offered to be the dear boy's horse. I found him crying up-stairs, because he had no one to play with. We had a good run all round the corridors; and then nothing would please him but that I must come down here and show myself in harness! Well, Herbert, safe back again? and are these the two little lassies? Come here, dears, and let me look at you. This is Milly, I suppose, with the fair hair, blue eyes, and little turn-up nose,—that means mischief, eh? I thought so; and this is Ethel with the dark hair, grey eyes, and straight nose. Well, you both look nice little girls, and I'm very glad to see you.'

'What a funny old lady!' thought both the children, and, as if in answer to their thoughts, Harry said—

'Isn't she a funny old Grandmamma? I call her my Silverhair; she's just like the little old woman in the story of the Three Bears.'

'Isn't he a piece of impudence?' laughed little Mrs. Leigh, shaking her finger at him. 'Bless his bonny face, his granny would do anything in the world for him, she would.'

'His granny has a great deal to answer for, I think,' said Herbert. 'It's quite time the stern stepfather stepped in to stop all this spoiling; isn't it, Agnes?'

'I like that,' said Harry, with an air of supreme contempt; '*you* stern, indeed! Why, I could turn you round my little finger!'

'You impudent little mortal!' said Herbert, running after him, and catching him up spite of screams and struggles. 'Yes, no wonder you look shocked, Milly. Now, mamma, what is to be done with this refractory young gentleman?—shall I carry him off to bed?'

'No, no,' shouted Harry; 'it's not bed-time yet. I want to talk to Aunt Milly and the other one.'

'Ah! but it is bed-time,' said Mrs. Neville; 'so go along, sir. I'll come up and say good-night to you. Take him off, Herbert.'

But this was no very easy task, for Harry's struggles and kicks increased until Herbert could hardly hold him. He had no intention, however, of giving way to him.

'It's no good, young man, you'll have to go. Now then, say good-night all round.'

'No,' said Harry, sturdily, 'only to my horse; I don't love any of the others.'

'Bless his little heart! Bring him here, Herbert. Good-

night, my precious;'—in a whisper, 'we'll have another run together to-morrow.'

'Good-night, Silverhair.' And as, still held by Mr. Grant, he bent down to kiss her, he caught hold of her cap and pulled it off, bringing with it, strange to say, all the beautiful silver tresses that adorned the old lady's head.

The sight of poor Mrs. Leigh's bald pate, and her look of dismay at the catastrophe, was too much for Ethel and Milly. They went off into fits of laughter, in which Harry joined as he held up his trophy in triumph.

'Oh, you naughty, naughty boy!' shrieked his grandmother; 'give me back my cap directly. How dare you, sir!'

'Harry! Harry!' called out his mother, perfectly horrified at her son's audacity, and in an agony lest any of the servants should come into the room.

'Give it to Mrs. Leigh directly, Harry,' said Herbert, very sternly, at the same time with the greatest difficulty controlling his inclination to laugh; and, thinking he had gone far enough, Harry tossed the cap and front at his Grandmother, calling out—

'Don't be angry, dear little Silverhair; I *knew* it was all pinned on. Oh! what a lark, to be sure!'

Herbert carried him off, and Mrs. Leigh ran upstairs to restore her head-dress to its usual unruffled condition. Meanwhile the two little girls began apologizing to Agnes for their laughter, and said they hoped Mrs. Leigh would not think them very rude.

'How could any one help laughing?' said Mrs. Neville; 'I feel very much ashamed of my little boy. I don't know what you must think of him; but really it's his grandmother's fault; she has spoilt him to such a degree that I can do no-

thing with him. Poor little fellow! I don't know how he'll get on at school, where he is going in February.'

'Is he really only eight?' asked Milly; 'he talks as if he were much older.'

'Because he has always lived with grown-up people; he makes use of the most ridiculous words for a child, sometimes, and reasons about things in a wonderful way. At times he's as good as gold, at others a very little imp of mischief. But now, my dear children, come upstairs and take off your things. You have your own little room of course, Milly, and Herbert thought you would like Ethel to sleep next you, so he had a bed put up in the outer nursery.'

'Oh! that will be very nice; how kind of him to think of it! How jolly it is to see the dear old place again! I hope it won't rain to-morrow. I'm longing to show you everything, Ethel. Jane says my rabbits are quite well, and that the little one Joe gave me has grown into such a beauty.'

Millicent's wish was gratified, the weather was very fine all the ensuing week, but it was also very cold. The children, however, were perfectly indifferent on this point; and when a hard frost set in, and Herbert offered to teach them to skate, their felicity was complete. About this time there began to arrive at the house huge packing-cases from London, directed to Mrs. Neville, which were all carried into an unfurnished room near the dining-room, and safely locked up.

'What can be in those boxes?' Milly said to Ethel one morning. 'I think Agnes must be going to give us a Christmas tree or something.'

'How nice it will be!' returned Ethel. 'What fun we shall have! But I don't think she is, because when little Harry said the other day that he had never seen one, she

replied, "Well, if all's well, you shall have one next Christmas, Harry."'

'But next Christmas has nothing to do with this Christmas,' said Milly sagaciously. 'Well, we shall see. I'm sure there's something going on, because the other day I came into the drawing-room suddenly where Herbert and Agnes were talking, and I heard her say, "We must give the little ones a happy Christmas." I think, though, it would be better fun to be in the secret, and help in the preparations; don't you, Ethel?'

Apparently the same idea struck Mrs. Neville; for, on the following day, she took the two girls into her confidence, and told them that Mr. Grant was going to give them a party on New Year's Eve, and that she had thought of an amusement more charming and novel than even a German tree, and she wanted their help in getting it up. But although Milly and Ethel were let into the secret, we must wait patiently to know it till the eventful night arrives. Mrs. Leigh and Harry were kept completely in the dark.

'What a shame, Silverhair, isn't it?' said that young gentleman; 'but I don't care much. I daresay it's some girls' rubbish; and now that mamma's always shut up in that room, I can do any mischief I like. And didn't I have jolly fun in the garden yesterday eating raw carrots!'

At which wicked speech old Mrs. Leigh tried to look very grave, and held up her finger reprovingly; but Harry, giving a saucy toss of his head, only jumped on her lap, and began searching her numerous pockets for what he called 'gobble,' by which expressive term he designated the sticky mass of lemon and pear drops, wrapped up in whitey-brown paper, which was the result of his researches. Meanwhile active preparations were going on in the private room, carpenters

and upholsterers were in attendance, and all were as busy as bees. Every house in the neighbourhood was full for Christmas, and a great many children had promised to come from far and near for the Fairfield party.

Time seemed to fly to the children; for, besides the business consequent on the all-important secret, they were helping Mrs. Neville with the decorations for the church; and many a holly and gay garland were made by their quick busy little fingers. Very little pains had ever been taken to make the church look pretty on bygone Christmases; the good old rector always said he had no 'women folk to fuss about such things,' and so the decorations, being guided by the taste of the sexton's wife, had hitherto consisted of a huge bunch of evergreens tied round each pillar, and straggling sprigs of holly stuck here and there about the different pews, reading desk, and pulpit. But a very different effect was produced by Agnes's decorations. The pillars were lightly wreathed with spiral cords of evergreens, and chaplets of dark green holly, with many a bright red berry, were placed round the capitals. Round the arches were more wreaths, and in the space between each was hung either a cross made of holly, or a triangle of yew and holly. The effect, when finished, was very pretty; and Milly, who had never seen anything like it before, was highly delighted.

'Mamma used to talk of all this to me in India,' she said to Agnes on Christmas Eve, as they left the church, after having put the finishing stroke to the decorations. 'She and Aunt Mary used to decorate grandmamma's church; and they always gave the twelve oldest women in the parish a nice dinner of roast beef and plum-pudding on Christmas Day, and a red cloak each as well.'

'Are there no pet old men and women of yours that we can visit before going home?' asked Mrs. Neville.

'Oh dear! I know what I should like to do,' said Milly, stopping short, as the idea struck her.

'What is it?'

'Why, I should so like to give poor Mrs. Dickson a nice piece of beef for to-morrow. I wonder if I might! Do you think Herbert would mind? I've got some money left, quite enough, I should think.'

'I am sure he wouldn't mind; how could he?' replied Agnes. 'Shall we order some from the butcher, and then walk down to her cottage and tell her it is coming?'

'Oh yes,' said Milly; 'I am so glad I thought of it.'

As they walked along, Ethel asked Mrs. Neville why people never used mistletoe in decorating churches, 'the white berry would look so pretty; don't you think so?' she said.

'Who was it who used to worship the mistletoe?' replied Mrs. Neville, answering one question by another.

'The Druids.'

'Yes; it was held in the greatest veneration by the Pagans, and for that reason was banished by the Christians, as a symbol of a false creed.'

'Why did the Druids worship it?' asked Ethel.

'Because, so I have read, they wrought wonderful cures in diseases by the juice of the berry; but only, it is said, from the berries of mistletoe grown on oak-trees. The oak was also sacred to them, you know.'

'What lots of funny customs there are at Christmas time!' said Ethel. 'I wonder why people eat mince pies?'

'That, I can't say; although some people have a theory that their origin was in celebration of the offerings of the

Wise Men, who came bearing spices and other choice productions from the East; but it's a very far-fetched idea.'

'I don't understand what mince pies can have to do with the Wise Men,' said Milly.

'Why, don't you see,' explained Ethel, 'mince pies are made of very rich things,—plums and citron, etc.,—and the Wise Men—'

'Oh yes, I see; how stupid I am!' laughed Milly. 'What fun English Christmases are! it was so different in India, with no snow or holly. I hope we shall have snap-dragon to-night, Agnes; I shall ask Herbert if we may. Harry declares that he'll pull out more plums than I shall; but I'm sure he won't.'

'We have mummers at Elworthy; but I am so glad there are none here,' said Ethel; 'I can't bear them.'

'What are they?' asked Milly.

'Oh, men who dress up, and come and sing and act. One is Old Father Christmas, another St. George, and so on. They fight, and get knocked down one after the other. It's very stupid, and they quite frightened poor little Violet last time, she screamed and clung so to mamma. True read her a lecture, and told her she was very silly; but it was no use.'

'True is such fun when she lectures, Violet!' said Milly. 'I like to see her draw herself up and look important; the Duchess is a capital name for her. Oh, here we are at Mrs. Dickson's!' and as she knocked at the door, she added, 'How well I remember the last time I came here! I felt so frightened. It was very naughty of me to come, wasn't it, Agnes? I was so sorry afterwards, and so ill too.'

'I wonder you weren't much worse; you were very lucky to escape with only a cold.'

At this moment the door opened, and Joe's face appeared, shining with yellow soap, as well as with pleasure.

'How do you do, Joe?' said Milly; 'is Mrs. Dickson at home?'

'Yes, Miss, if you please. Step in marm; mother'll be down in a minute like.'

'We've come to wish you a happy Christmas,' said Mrs. Neville. 'I'm very glad you can spend it with your mother.'

'Thank yer, marm.' Then turning shyly to Milly: 'Please, Miss, we've got Ned a-coming to dinner along of us to-morrow.'

'Have you? Oh! I'm so glad; then you are good friends now, Joe?'

Joe grinned, and scratched his head dubiously; but his mother coming in, and overhearing Milly's question, answered for him. 'Oh yes, Miss, I hopes they be. Ned has been much pleasanter like to him since that half-crown business; and yesterday, after Farmer Palmer had told my boy he might come home to-day and stay over to-morrow, poor Ned seemed so downcast and miserable like, at having no home to go to for Christmas Day, that Joe, he says to him, "Come along o' me, Ned; leastways come to mother's on Christmas Day, and go to church, and have a bit of dinner with us."'

'And,' interrupted Joe, gaining courage, 'Ned said, "I will, Joe," and shook my hand quite friendly like.'

'That's right, Joe,' said Mrs. Neville. 'This is the time to put aside all unfriendly feeling, and to live in peace and goodwill with all around us.'

'Yes indeed, ma'am; so I telled Joe; and, says I, "Our dinner's a poor one, but Ned he's welcome to it."'

'For all that, I hope you'll have a very good one to-morrow, Mrs. Dickson,' said Agnes; 'for Miss Milly has ordered you a piece of beef from the butcher's, and there will be a plum-pludding sent you from the house.'

'Oh, ma'am! Oh, Miss Milly! Oh, Joe! Only think of that!' cried Mrs. Dickson. Joe opened his eyes very wide, and grinned from ear to ear. 'Lor', what a lark! Whatever'll Ned say?' And then Mrs. Dickson began pouring out her thanks, until Milly was fairly driven out of the cottage, wondering how Agnes and Ethel could stop to hear them. But Mrs. Neville, more accustomed than Milly to visit the poor, knew that there is nothing they dislike more than to be cut short in speaking, and not allowed to have their say out. 'It's many a Christmas since I've tasted real roast beef,' Joe's mother ended by saying; 'not since I was servant over at Squire Adam's.'

'What were you going to have, then, for dinner to-morrow?' asked Ethel, surprised; for to her young ideas every one fed on beef and plum-pudding at Christmas time.

'A bit of bacon and a tater or two,' replied Mrs. Dickson. 'We think ourselves lucky when we gets that much even. But oh, what a feast we shall have to-morrow!' she added, lifting her hands in delight. 'Miss Milly, bless her heart! is always at some kindness or other. I've not forgotten her coming down here that night with the half-crown, no, nor ever shall, either.'

'Or her running on to the doctor's all alone in the dark,' put in Joe, on whom this feat of Milly's had made an impression never to be effaced.

'No, nor that either, bless her little heart! Well! good-bye, ma'am. Thank you kindly for calling. It will be a blessed day when you come here for good, it will.'

'Oh, here you are at last!' exclaimed Milly, as they rejoined her outside. 'I thought you never would come. I can't bear being thanked, and all that kind of thing, so I rushed away.'

'It is unpleasant,' said Mrs. Neville. 'But it is better to bear it patiently than to risk hurting people's feelings by running away abruptly as you did, Milly. As a rule, the poorer classes think more of a kind manner than of a kind deed.'

'But that is very silly,' said Millicent.

'Very likely; but it is so. Dear me, how late it is getting! We must hurry home, or we shall be benighted, and I shall have you two children laid up with bad colds to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XIV.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

AT length the day of the party arrived. All the mysterious preparations, as Harry called them, were finished, and in a very few hours his curiosity would be satisfied. It was to be an early party, beginning at seven o'clock; after tea, the grand event of the evening was to come off, and then there was to be dancing and games until supper-time.

'What can it be we are going to see, Mary?' said Lily Marsh to another little girl. 'Georgie says she's sure it's a gigantic Christmas tree; but I don't believe it is, or it wouldn't be made such a secret.'

'I'll tell you what I think,' said the Mary addressed. 'I think it's a big bath filled with sawdust or bran, and that we shall each have a dip in it, and bring up a present in our hands.'

'What! dip right down into the bran with our ball dresses on? Oh! I hope not,' said Lily. 'It would quite spoil my tulle puffings;' and she pulled out her dress in a consequential manner, in order that Mary might see what a pretty one it was.

Harry, who was near the little girls, saw the action, and

was prompted by a spirit of mischief to say, 'I'll tell you all about it, if you like.'

'Oh! do,' they both exclaimed.

'Well, it's a shower-bath.'

'What?'

'A shower-bath. You know what that is, don't you? Not a water shower-bath, of course, but one which rains sugar plums and all kinds of sweeties.'

'What nonsense!' said Lily, turning disdainfully away. 'Who ever heard of such a thing!'

'Ah! well you'll see; and all the boys will jump in, one after the other, and pull the string and get all the gobble, 'cause the girls will be too much afraid of the bumps on their heads. They *are* such cowards, gals are!'

'And boys *are* so rude!' returned Mary, with flaming cheeks.

'Oh! are they, miss? Very well, then. Now I shan't give *you* any of the sugar plums *I* get out of the shower-bath. So there.'

'I don't want any, and I don't believe a word of your rubbish. It isn't true, is it?' she asked, seizing hold of Milly, who was running by, apparently in a great hurry.

'What isn't true?'

'Why, that the secret is only a great shower-bath raining sugar plums?'

Milly burst out laughing. 'Has Harry been trying to make you believe such stuff? Well, you must wait and see. I haven't time to stop now. But can you tell me where Tommy is, Mary? I want him particularly.'

'He was here a minute ago. But what do you want him for?'

'Never mind,' said Milly, and away she ran, leaving the

two little girls in a pleasant state of mystification. But everything comes to an end at last, and so did their suspense; for, a few minutes later, *the* room was announced to be open, and the children invited to walk in. It was quite dark, and a slight feeling of awe was mixed with their curiosity, as they crept in on tiptoe, the boldest in advance. For a few moments they could distinguish nothing; but after the door was closed their eyes became accustomed to the dim light, and they perceived that the four corners of the room were partitioned off by what seemed dark curtains. While they were yet wondering what these might cover, the light grew dimmer and dimmer, till all was total darkness. Some of the little ones were half inclined to be frightened, and clung to those near them; but their attention was soon diverted to sounds of music, soft, slow, as if at a distance, and to a small faint light, which began slowly to spread over one corner of the room. Indistinct forms, seen as it were through a mist, gradually appeared, becoming more and more distinct as the mist slowly melted away. Brighter and brighter grew the light, and nearer and nearer sounded the pretty air, 'Where shall I seek thee, beautiful Spring?' till an irrepressible exclamation of delight burst from the children, as they saw before them a lovely life-like picture.

On a bank of primroses and violets, under a bower of hawthorn and lilac in full bloom, sat a little shepherdess in picturesque costume, twining a wreath of spring-flowers round the neck of a pet lamb. Behind her appeared a sunny landscape—blue hills, fields with sheep and lambs, and distant woods, bright with their fresh green foliage, from among which, at intervals, was heard faintly the voice of the cuckoo proclaiming spring. The children were

watching intently to see what would happen next, expecting the shepherdess would move; for, although motionless, as if painted, they could see she was a real figure, when gradually a beautiful rosy hue spread over the picture, becoming deeper and deeper, till at length the scene and music faded away, and all was again dark and silent as night.

After a moment's pause, day seemed to dawn again in another direction, as the air, 'Oh! Summer Morn!' was softly played. This time the mist vanished more rapidly than before, under the influence of a brighter and warmer sunshine.

On a rustic bench, in an arbour formed by arches grown over with roses, jessamines, and honeysuckles, reclined a girl, who seemed to have fallen asleep, while idly weaving a long garland of roses, which lay lightly across her lap, one end trailing on the ground. Near her was a basket filled with strawberries, cherries, and cut flowers, on which a beautiful peacock butterfly had alighted. Summer flowers, of all colours, grew in gay masses outside the arbour; and in the background was seen a beautiful park with a lake, round which were noble trees in full leaf, under whose spreading branches numbers of cattle and deer sought shelter from the rays of the summer's sun.

Again, the ruddy glow of sunset, followed by the shades of evening, stole over the scene—all that was so bright gently fading away into darkness. Again day seemed to dawn, and a new sun to shine on a third picture, as the music began afresh to the tune of 'All among the Barley!' This time a cottage porch was seen covered with vines and hops in full bearing. Two figures were in the foreground —one a boy seated on the ground, a large basket full of

all kinds of fruit beside him; the other a girl, who stood by, apparently talking to him, and who was crowned with a wreath of scarlet poppies and blue corn flowers, and carried on her shoulder a sheaf of corn she had gleaned. Behind them was a garden, bright with hollyhocks, dahlias, and other autumnal flowers, and rich in apple, pear, and plum-trees, laden with fruit; and beyond it were golden corn-fields, backed by woods gay with all the varied tints of autumn.

By this time the elder, and many even of the younger children, had begun to understand that the seasons of the year were being represented, each in one of the four corners of the room, by '*tableaux vivants*,' or living pictures, and that the figures were real people dressed up, and placed in attitudes in which they remained motionless, so as to form a part of the picture. Even Mary Allen's little sister, Dora, seemed to have been revolving in her four-year-old mind the causes and effects of what she had seen, and to have arrived at a tolerably correct conclusion, needing only the confirmation it received at this moment. In a somewhat surprised, but quiet tone of not-to-be-shaken conviction, she broke the dead silence with 'Why! that's my brother, Tommy, in that funny itty hat! Tommy, who dave 'oo all those nice apples and pums? Me ike pums; div me one!'

The fruit-gatherer's face grew redder and redder, but not from the red glow of sunset. His fixed features, after twitching a moment, relaxed into a broad grin; one hand rose to his face, but not in time to stop a 'quirk' of suppressed laughter which burst from him. The darkness of night came on suddenly, without evening or twilight; but the silence of night came not with its darkness, for the

'quirk, quirk, quirk,' went on in the corner, and, caught by the audience, echoed all over the room, gaining strength till it grew into a general roar of laughter. When order was a little restored, the children turned, quite naturally, to the fourth and last corner, fully prepared to see winter appear to the tune of 'Blow, blow thou wintry wind!' Some even speculated, in whispers, as to what the various objects first seen in that dim mistiness would turn out to be. Very wintry, indeed, was the scene, when at last it was revealed clearly in a cold, bluish light. In a cavern of ice, with icicles hanging from the roof, an old man, muffled in a ragged cloak and hood, which nearly concealed his features, crouched over a miserable little fire, and, shivering with cold, spread his hands towards it, trying to warm them. In the background a snowy range of mountains rose behind a frozen lake, by whose shores grew a few fir-trees, their branches drooping downwards from the weight of the snow that lay on them. By degrees the old man's fire burnt brighter and brighter, the light in the cavern grew warmer, and the warmth melting the icicles, they gradually disappeared, festoons of dark green ivy and scarlet-berried holly taking their place, the furthest of which, growing longer and longer, at length entirely shut out the view of the lake and mountains; and in this way the ice cave was transformed into a pretty grotto, decorated for Christmas, and looking bright and warm, as if from the light and warmth of a merry Christmas fire. Still the old man remained motionless, and the children were expecting to see this scene die away like the rest; but instead of evening, a most unexpected *something* came which made them laugh, even more than Tommy's break-down. A strange-looking bird suddenly hopped across the grotto, gave the old man a peck on the

back, dropped a paper, and hopped off again. It was evidently a robin redbreast; but it must have been an extinct species, allied to the dodo, which in some respects it resembled. Its body was as large as that of a good-sized sheep, and it hopped in the most comically awkward way, flapping a pair of funny little wings, which were no larger, in proportion to its body, than those of a puffin. When the old man felt the peck, he started, glanced timidly in the direction the bird had taken, and muttered, tragically—

'Methought I had a *summons* from a *beak!* Yon strange creature hath somewhat the appearance of a Robin, or Robert, familiarly called a Bobby! But no! Its colour is a sort of brown, or brown dun; I may say it is a *dun*, and it has a *bill!* Alas! how very brown I am done! I dreamt that here, in this icy cave, I should be safe from Christmas duns and Christmas bills. Stay! It's no longer icy! But icy or not icy, I *see!*—what do I see?'

The old man fixed his eyes on the paper the bird had dropped, shuddered, and picked it up, continuing in a whining tone—

'A Bill! What is a Bill?—a short William. So is Will! Therefore, according to Cocker, Bill is the same as Will. Would it were so! But nothing is more contrary to my will than a bill! However,' he sighed, after a thoughtful pause, 'Willy or Nilly, I'll look at my Billy!'

He stopped for a few moments, as if to read it by the light of the fire, then suddenly jumped up. The ragged cloak and hood fell to the ground, the long white hair and beard were gone, and a jolly-looking old man, with a comfortable rotundity of waist, dressed in a scarlet robe, and crowned with ivy and mistletoe, made a polite bow to the audience, and began in a deep and rather gruff voice—

'I thought it was a regular *bill*—a *do*.
It's nought but a regular *billet-doux*.'

And then he went on to read it:

'Musa is *a* muse: Father Christmas, you're musing,
You miss *a*, that's amiss; get up! be amusing!
You've a lot of young friends, 'tis your duty to cheer,
A merry night to you all, and a happy new year.
Every one must be happy, no crying or sobbing,
I'm ever your loving,
See oh Seek a COCK ROBIN.'

Father Christmas then addressed the company:

'My kyind young friends, perhaps you may have thought
That, like the other seasons, winter ought
To pass away. But if you'd think, 'tis clear,
We represent the seasons of the year.
I'm winter time (and winter still is here);
Spring, summer, autumn, all have passed away,
This year, as you have seen them pass this day.
Fresh spring, bright summer, golden autumn too,
Will often come again, I hope, for you.
You saw the cold of winter, dark and drear,
As brighter blazed my fire, disappear.
So long as burns the good old log of Yule,
I, merry Christmas, all the seasons rule.
My summons they obey; I can recall,
To make my season merry, one and all;
But, for the present, 'twill be just as well,
On pleasures of the present time to dwell.
First, then, let's see what winter has in store,
And then recall the Past, if we want more.

From snow-clad mountain, or from frozen sea,
Genius of Winter! Come! I summon thee!'

A postman's knock was heard:

'Come in, Genius.'

The robin redbreast hopped in, in a jaunty manner, singing in a very human small boy voice,

'Slap bang, here we are again!'

Father Christmas. Hallo! sir! who are you? Are you a fairy?

Cock Robin. Like all birds, Father Christmas, I'm e-f-f-f-f-airy.
You called out, come ingenious, so I came.

F. C. I called out, come in, Genius!

C. R. That's the same!
At catching worms I am ingenious—very!

F. C. Can you do anything to make us merry?

C. R. The weather's cold, the worms their holes are laid in,
And won't attend to my pe-pecker-suading;
When they are 'in a hole,' I'm 'up a tree;'
When they're froze in, 'I'm all froze out, froze out,'
As they're fixed in, I'm in a fix, no doubt.

F. C. We don't want worms—

C. R. They're very sweet; but stay!
I can amuse you in another way.
Oh! such a jolly way! and, what is more, I
Flatter myself my talent's known in story:
'Babes in the wood' is such a lively game;
You're 'cruel uncle,' just, you know, in name.
Let two of yon sweet children go and lie
Out in the wood, and cry a bit, and die.
Then I, Robin Redbreast, pitifulye
Will kiver them over with leaves!

F. C. Oh, fie!

You should say 'cover;' but you have our *leaves*
To *leave* alone your covering of *leaves*.
*Dis*cover something better, or else go!

C. R. It's very cross of you to treat me so!
I came here for a treat; I won't *retreat*,
Till you treat me to something nice to eat.
Though on worms and grubs is my beak intent,
With crumbs or other grub I'll be content!

F. C. Come 'hop the twig;' you *twig*, I hope! I say,
Hopping and twigs are rather in *your way*.
You're very much in *mine*—so mizzle, do!
Or I will slay you! by my mistle toe!

While Father Christmas was engaged driving the Robin away, a huge Polar Bear stalked in, growling fiercely.

F. C. Hallo! sir! who are you? Are you a fairy?

P. B. Like all bears, Father Christmas, I'm ow-f-f-f-f-hairy.
Near the North Pole, and ice-bound in a bay,
I heard your summons—*I'se bound* to obey.

F. C. Come, what have you got to give my little dears?
You have come empty handed, or pawed, it appears.

P. B. Well, they may suck my paws, they're very sweet;
I often suck them when I've nought to eat.

F. C. *Pause!* Is there nothing in your lands inscrutable
That might be found—than your own paws—more suitable?

P. B. I've brought a man!

F. C. A man! What for?

P. B. To eat!
Some parts of him they'll find are very sweet;
The rest they'll play with, or do with what they please.

F. C. How mean you, bear? Such food is not the cheese.

Not any salary could induce a true man
To eat a *human supper*—'twould be *super* human!

P. B. What nonsense you are talking! Why, he's snow man!

F. C. You said 'a man,' and now you say 'he's no man.'

P. B. I said he's made of snow. There's no things
Where I came from excepting snow things.

F. C. Well, show him in, and we shall see, at least,
What are your Polar notions of a feast.

The bear growled, and a very big snow man, of singularly rude features and ill-proportioned figure, toddled in, smoking a pipe, and carrying in his arms a large snow basket filled with snowballs.

F. C. Good morning, sir! As you so well can walk,
I take for granted you can also talk.

P. B. Well, no; if I might be so very bold,
His nature's somewhat too reserved and cold.

F. C. A very frigid present this does seem.

P. B. I've nothing else to give except—'ice-cream.'

F. C. Then *scream* away. But quick! begone and bring
In half a jiffey some much warmer thing—
Whate'er you please, but mind it's *a nice* thing.

P. B. Why, you said warm—what's colder than *an ice* thing?

F. C. Genius! Your genius is a thick un!
Go, fetch me *ice* resembling a chicken.
And quick you must return, or I will turn you whole
From Polar bear into a barer pole
Than e'er projected on the frontispiece
Of barber's shop, who kept live bears for grease!
Ay, tremble! But why gape and scratch your head?

P. B. I didn't understand, sir, what you said.

We've ice of all sorts in my land; but, oh!
What ice like chicken can be I don't know.

F. C. Bruin, though you may be a *high bear Polar*,
You're not at all well up to *hyperbola!*
Learn then! As a chicken follows an *hen*,
So n*ice* is *ice* that follows an N.

The bear hurried off; but, at the same moment, a voice, as of a small boy, arose among the audience.

'Oh! oh! I know who Father Christmas is. Ho! ho! It's Uncle Henry Mountfield. He! he! Nobody else could have made such an awful bad pun!'

Father Christmas, seemingly in a great rage, seized snowball after snowball from the snow man's basket, and threw them at the children, who at first avoided them, but finding they were not hard, but thin hollow balls of sugar, containing all kinds of goodies, a regular scramble ensued, in which the children became so excited, that even Lily forgot her tulle puffings, and scrambled as eagerly as the rest. Order was hardly restored when the bear trotted in again, carrying an enormous plum-pudding in his arms, and followed by Cock Robin, who screamed after him—

'Stop thief! stop thief! I really won't a-bear it.'

P. B. to *F. C.* Here's your ice chicken.

C. R. Well, that is a good un!
He's been and gone and stole my own plum-puddin'.

P. B. Hold your tongue, will you! You're nothing but a *robin!*

C. R. And you're another! You're nothing but a *robbing!*
It's *bare*faced robbery, and that is *wurser*,
Or, *double you, you bear*, if I don't err, sir.

P. B. How so, small bird?

C. R. Why, you're an *Ursa*,
And *W*—ursa, I should say, spells *wurser;*
But, mark my words, though now you *may jaw*,
We'll soon be quits, my Ursa *Major.*

P. B. How so?

C. R. Why, I'm—h'm!—made for the air,
And you'll soon be Pom—made for the hair.

As he said these words Cock Robin turned tail, and hopped off as quickly as his legs could carry him, shrieking 'Bear's grease! bear's grease!' while the bear, furious at this greatest of all insults to one of his species, set the pudding down and pursued him. Father Christmas brought forward a table and dish, in which he placed the pudding, and, just as he had done so, the bear came back, and humbly begged permission to return to his own country, as he had done his best in the two presents he had brought.

Father Christmas, however, refused, saying—

'There's luck in odd numbers, bring me a third.'

Again the bear retired, and there was a moment's pause, broken however by little Dora's voice—

'Nicey white things! itty me likes them.'

On which Father Christmas seemed to grow angry again, and began snowballing the children as before. When the scramble was over, the bear again appeared, carrying the lifeless body of poor Cock Robin.

Father Christmas started back horrified, and exclaimed—

'Who killed Cock Robin?'

P. B. You bade me bring a bird!

F. C. I never did; I bade you bring a *third!*'

P. B. I much regret, sir, if perchance I've erred,
You said TH-ird, and I have brought you a B-ird.

TH is short for *the*, which is an article,
And so is B, it matters not one particle.

F. C. You don't know your letters, I vow and declare,
A is an article, B stands for bear.

P. B. If you'd robbed as many hives as I, you'd know,
That *Bees* don't stand for Bears, though you say so,
But fly at 'em and sting, till every part tickles,—
Bees in a rage, I know, are ticklish articles.

F. C. Well, *be* it so! Here lies Cock Robin dead and cold,
His melancholy tale perhaps you will unfold.

Bruin, mistaking his meaning, seized Cock Robin by the *tail.* Father Christmas mistaking his, and thinking he was going to run off with him, seized Cock Robin by the head. A struggle ensued, in which the unhappy bird's body was torn in two, when, to the astonishment of the spectators, a heap of toys and pretty articles of all kinds fell from it, leaving only half an empty skin in the hands of Father Christmas, who, as well as the bear, had tumbled down from the sudden separation of the parts. The bear slunk out of sight on all fours.

Father Christmas got up slowly from the ground, as if hurt by his fall, and, apparently very angry, looked about for the Polar bear; but the bear was gone, and Father Christmas had no one on whom to vent his rage but the snow man, who still stood in the same place, with his pipe in his mouth, and a provokingly stolid smile on his countenance.

'How dare you smoke in the presence of ladies, you grinning booby! Take that!' and Father Christmas gave him a good box on the ear. The snow man's head fell to

the ground, and the skull, seemingly made of very fragile material, broke into a thousand bits. No wonder the poor snow man hadn't much to say for himself; he had very few *ideas* in his head, though it was full of what our American cousins would call 'assorted notions.' In lieu of brains a variety of small articles were scattered on the ground, and mingled with the contents of Robin Redbreast's body. A general shout rose from the children, and hands and arms were stretched out eagerly towards the toys and bonbons. Father Christmas looked with comic astonishment at the result of his blow, and set about collecting some of the principal articles; but they seemed endowed with supernatural powers,—doll, duck, frog, bird, each in succession, as he was about to pick it up, jumped away from him, not naturally on its legs, but rolling head over heels, utterly regardless of the established laws of locomotion.

After many fruitless attempts, Father Christmas gave up all hope, and, apparently touched by the children's disappointed faces, said in a penitent tone, 'Oh dear! I can't help it, I'm so sorry! How I wish poor Cocky Robin, or even that great ugly Polar bear, were here to help me; I really can't catch these slippery articles all by myself!' The words were hardly out of his mouth, when a very elegantly-dressed young gentleman, apparently of the wingless fairy or genius order, appeared, leading by the hand a younger member of the same family.

'Here we are,' he said, 'in our evening clothes; the fur and feathers were only our travelling costumes.'

Father Christmas made many apologies for his somewhat unpolite treatment of them on their former appearance; but they gave him a pat on the back, and said they didn't mind, as he was a jolly, good old fellow at heart; and then they

set to work to collect the toys, etc., which seemed to have lost their jumping propensities, and were soon collected and placed in two heaps, one on each side of the plum-pudding, which stood in the centre of the table.

'Now, let's carve my plum-pudding,' said Cock Robin, or the younger genius; and taking a knife, he sliced a piece of something that looked like thick peel from the top.

'A new way of carving a plum-pudding,' said Father Christmas, peeping into the inside, adding, 'What a funny pudding!' as he put in his thumb, and pulled out—not a plum, but a small packet wrapped in gilt paper, rather like a large bonbon. When opened, it was found to contain a round piece of card-board, divided into four quarters, on each of which was written the name of one of the four seasons of the year, with different numbers marked below it. 'What can this mean?' asked Father Christmas.

Cock Robin explained that the pudding was full of similar tickets, which would entitle the holders to receive from the various seasons certain presents indicated by the numbers marked on the cards. 'Suppose we pass it round, and every one can put in their hand and draw out a ticket.'

'But first,' said Father Christmas, 'we must summon back the other seasons, which have passed away;' and taking a sprig of mistletoe, he waved it three times round his head, saying—

'Come Spring and Summer—Autumn too,
Come quickly! for we've need of you.'

The next moment the curtains in front of the other corners of the room had risen, and the three seasons appeared as before, their full brightness making the room look like a fairy palace. The scenes were the same; but the shepherdess with her lamb, the sleeping beauty, the fruit-boy

and gleaner, had vanished like the Polar bear and Cock Robin, and in their places were fairies appropriately attired to represent the seasons, each standing behind a table laden with gifts.

Then Father Christmas took the plum-pudding in his arms, and, leaving his grotto, joined the company, passing it round from one to the other, until each person had taken out a ticket. The genius of Spring (who was Milly) was then called upon to distribute her gifts, and very pretty ones they were, appropriate to the season: bonbonnières in the shape of birds' nests, pins, brooches, and bracelets made to represent snowdrops, primroses, violets, daisies, and other spring-flowers; and for the younger children, toys in the shape of lambs, swallows, rabbits, etc. etc.

Ethel, as Summer, had equally pretty things to give away —beautiful China roses, containing photographs at which you looked through a large dew-drop, butterfly brooches, and earrings; scent-bottles concealed in croquet mallets, balls, hay-cocks, etc.; baskets of strawberries, cherries as boxes, and a hundred other suitable devices.

Agnes undertook the part of goddess of Autumn, and from her horn of abundance, drew out the most beautiful presents. Bunches of grapes, each berry of which contained sweet-smelling scent; pomegranates, melons, and pine-apples, filled with bonbons; *étuis* in the form of sheaves of corn; acorns, holding gold and silver thimbles; rosy-cheeked apples, etc. etc.

Harry's present from Autumn was one that pleased him particularly. It was a bunch of filberts prettily modelled in wood. 'Unscrew the nuts,' said his mother, smiling as she gave it him. He did so, and to his astonishment up jumped a little figure dressed as a *colonel* in full uniform!

Shouts of delight and screams of laughter came from the children at every moment. Each present seemed prettier than the last, and Father Christmas and Cock Robin had something funny to say about them all.

Winter's gifts were also appropriate to the season: miniature Christmas trees, snow balls, robins, squirrels, skates, sugar icicles, and small plum-puddings; besides dolls and figures prettily dressed as harlequins, clowns, and columbines.

The presents were at length all distributed, and the children, having safely deposited their treasures to the trustworthy care of mothers and aunts, danced away merrily till supper-time; after which important event they wound up the evening with a real old-fashioned country dance, for the sake of dancing the old year out and the new year in.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VISIT TO LONDON.

NOTWITHSTANDING that Ethel had declared herself 'so tired out' that she should like to 'go to sleep for a week,' she was up early next morning; and when Milly joined her some time later, she found her busily employed writing Rhoda a long account of the party.

'Oh! how can you, Ethel!' exclaimed her cousin, yawning. 'Aren't you too tired and too cold to write? I couldn't.'

'My head aches a little; but I know Rhoda will be so disappointed if she doesn't hear from me to-morrow, and I promised to send her a long account. I'm glad you've come, as I wanted to ask you the name of those two funny little girls in pink who amused us so much at supper-time. Do you remember?'

'Yes; but I don't know their names; at least I'm too tired to think of it.'

'Would you mind asking Mrs. Neville, dear? I'm describing them to Rhoda, and I know she would like to know their names.'

'Oh dear, what nonsense! What *can* it matter? Call them Crump—anything. I'm *so* tired, Ethel, I really can't

go and look for Agnes; she's right at the other end of the house.'

'Very well, never mind, then,' replied Ethel, and she went on with her letter.

'Oh dear! oh dear!' said Millicent, yawning again, 'your pen makes such a horrible scratching, it gives me a headache to hear it. Do leave off, Ethel, and talk.'

'I must finish my letter first; the post goes away so early; but I'll take it into another room; the pen *will* scratch, I can't prevent it;' and Ethel carried her desk into her own room, where she sat in the cold writing and sneezing till her budget was finished. Then she returned to Milly, who was comfortably curled up half asleep in an arm-chair in front of the fire.

'Here you are at last,' she said fretfully. 'What a time you've been over that stupid letter! Why, you look quite blue; and what makes you shiver so?'

'I'm rather cold,' said Ethel, kneeling down on the rug and warming her hands; 'but I shall be all right in a moment.'

'Where have you been all this time?' asked Milly. 'I was so dull I nearly went to sleep.'

'I've only been in my room finishing my writing.'

'In your room, without a fire!' cried Milly, now thoroughly aroused. 'Oh, Ethel! no wonder you are cold; and it's all my fault, too, for saying your pen scratched! I'm so sorry to have been so cross and selfish; but I never thought you had gone into your cold room,' and yet half a moment's thought would have told Milly that her cousin could have gone nowhere else.

'Never mind,' laughed Ethel; 'it doesn't matter, I shall soon get warm again;' but she was so thoroughly chilled that it was a long time before this took place, and Milly's

peace of mind was gone for the rest of the day, for she felt sure that Ethel would wake next morning with a very bad cold, caused by her (Milly's) selfishness. Two or three times in the night she awoke, and, sitting up in bed, listened anxiously to hear if any noise of sneezing or coughing was to be heard in the adjoining room, and long before Jane came into her room in the morning, she stole very softly to her cousin's bedside, and stood looking at her as she still slept.

Suddenly Ethel opened her eyes. 'Why, Milly, is anything the matter?' she exclaimed.

'Oh no,' kissing her. 'I only came to see if you had caught cold.'

'No,' said Ethel, laughing; 'of course I haven't, not in the least; but you will if you stand there any longer. Do go back to bed, dear, Milly, please do.'

'Oh, I'm all right. I shan't hurt. I am so glad you haven't caught cold. I was so afraid you would, and—'

'Miss Milly! Miss Milly! whatever are you a-doing, standing out there in the cold?' called out Jane's voice at this moment. 'Come back directly. Why, you haven't even put on your slippers! Oh my! what a child it is!'

'I'm coming,' cried Milly, running back. 'There—don't look so cross. There's no harm done. I never catch cold.'

'Oh, don't you, Miss? I suppose you've forgotten that time when—'

'I'm not going to remember anything unpleasant, and I'm going to dress very quickly, for it's such a lovely morning, I'm sure we shall be able to skate. It's all very well for you to look cross, and pretend to scold, but you know you won't have me much longer, Jane. I shall soon be going back, and then you'll be sorry.'

'Bless your little heart! Sorry to lose you! Yes, that I shall, indeed.' And with this thought melted away all Jane's attempt at sternness.

'What do you say to spending two or three days in London, little girls, on your way down to Elworthy?' asked Herbert, one morning at breakfast. 'Do you feel inclined for any sight-seeing?'

Inclined for sight-seeing they certainly were, but no longer inclined for any breakfast; for who, anticipating such supreme happiness as a visit to London at Christmas time, could find an appetite for bread and butter? Not Milly, or even quiet Ethel. Mr. Grant's proposal put them both into such a state of excitement that Harry, accustomed to London sights all his life, looked on amazed, and, if the truth be told, with no small contempt.

'Just like gals!' he confided to Silverhair. 'Fancy making such a hullabulloo about going to London, and seeing a pantomime, and the Zoo-oo—you know gardens. Why, I've seen it all lots of times, and I don't think it's such a very fine sight.'

'But you have lived in London all your life, dear, and have often been to the theatre, and seen the lions and tigers; but Ethel and Milly never have. It will be all new to them, don't you see?'

Harry shrugged his shoulders. But when asked by Milly if he wasn't very glad to go up to town, he admitted that it would be rather stunning to see a new pantomime; but he wondered at their making such a fuss about it. However, he did not succeed in damping their pleasure, and there could scarcely be two happier little girls in the world than were Milly and Ethel when they found themselves seated in the railway carriage *en route* for London. It was such

fun going to a hotel. Even climbing four flights of stairs to their rooms was delightful, a halo of pleasure surrounded everything, and never surely had mutton cutlets and boiled chicken tasted so delicious before.

Herbert was very much amused at their raptures, as well as at the long list of sights to be seen which they drew up after dinner. 'Three days will hardly "do" all these,' he said, smiling. 'You don't know what London distances are. However, we'll do as many as we can. And now, as we are to have such a frightfully busy day to-morrow, you must both run off to bed: and if you stay awake and chatter, I don't know what I shan't do to you.'

'Oh no! we won't talk; we shall want to go to sleep as fast as possible, that to-morrow may come quickly. Good-night, Herbert dear. Are you going to see Agnes? Give our best love to her. You will settle to go to the pantomime to-morrow, won't you, if we can get places?'

Most of my young readers—perhaps all, it may safely be presumed—have seen the common sights of London, such as the Tower, Westminster Abbey, the British Museum, Madame Tussaud's wax figures, etc., etc.: it would be needless, therefore, to describe the pleasures and fatigues of Milly's and Ethel's first day in town. One thing is certain, they thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and were thoroughly knocked up by dinner-time, so much so as even to feel quite glad that Mr. Grant had been unable to obtain places at the theatre until the following evening, when their delight was to be crowned by witnessing the pantomime of Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp.

Several things, however, were to happen before that time, and among them was a visit to Miss Horne, which Milly was most anxious to accomplish. 'Her pupils will be

having Christmas holidays,' she said to Herbert; 'so we are sure to find her at home.'

Accordingly, soon after breakfast, they set out with the intention of paying her a visit, and then of going on to the Zoological Gardens.

'What a dingy place to live in!' exclaimed Milly, as the cab rattled up a narrow, squalid-looking street in the neighbourhood of Albany Street, and stopped at Miss Horne's abode. 'Oh! Herbert, this can't be right; she can't possibly live in this place.'

'I'm afraid she does,' said Herbert, as he got out. 'Stop a moment, I'll ask first.'

A dirty, slip-shod child opened the door, and, with some difficulty, Mr. Grant made out that Miss Horne was at home, and that she lived on the second floor.

'Will you mind staying in the cab?' he asked Ethel, as Milly jumped out. 'I think you had better do so.'

'Oh no, I don't mind in the least; I've brought a book with me.'

'Oh! Herbert, what a place!' whispered Milly, as they mounted the uncarpeted stairs. 'How dreadful it must be for Miss Horne to live here! This must be the door; shall I knock?'

But before she could do so, the door opened, and a young girl, poorly but neatly dressed, with a portfolio under her arm, came out. They could hear her saying—

'I won't be longer than I can possibly help, aunt; try and keep up, do—'

She started back on seeing strangers, and Milly said—

'Will you tell us if Miss Horne lives here? We have come to see her.'

'My aunt, do you mean? Aunt Agatha? Oh yes; but she has been so ill, so dreadfully ill—'

'Ill!' exclaimed Herbert and Milly; and the latter added, 'that is why I have not heard from her for such a long time, then! May I see her?'

'I'll ask her if she's equal to it,' said the young girl, putting down her portfolio, and going back into the room. Next moment she returned, saying her aunt would gladly see them, if they would walk in.

'Oh, Miss Horne!' cried Milly, as a wan, gaunt figure, wrapped in a faded shawl, came forward to meet her. 'I'm so sorry to hear you've been so ill.'

'You dear, good child, to come and see me; how kind of you to bring her, Mr. Grant! Yes, I've been very ill, Milly, very nearly dying; and, although better, I'm not good for much now.'

No need to tell them that; her hollow eyes and sunken cheeks told their own sad tale.

'Sit down again, please,' said Milly, leading her back to her seat, close to the miserable little fire, which scarcely threw any warmth into the bare comfortless room. 'I'm sure you oughtn't to stand; how long have you been ill?'

'For some weeks now, my dear. I caught a violent cold in my chest in November, and neglected it till I grew so ill that I had to give up my pupils; and here I have been ever since, a sad drag on poor mother and Annie, I'm afraid.'

'Why didn't you write to us?' said Herbert; and Millicent, kneeling by her side, repeated the question with tears in her eyes.

'For some weeks I was too ill to hold a pen, and afterwards—well, then I shrank from writing, knowing that I

had nothing but what was unpleasant to tell you,' and poor Miss Horne gave a deep sigh as she spoke.

'What would have become of me without that dear little girl you saw in coming in, I cannot think. With some slight help from my brother, she entirely supports my poor old mother and myself.'

'In what way?' asked Mr. Grant.

'By selling her sketches. She draws for two or three of the magazines, and, thank God, has had plenty of work throughout the winter.'

Herbert and Milly stayed some little time longer with Miss Horne, and then were obliged to leave her, as they did not like keeping Ethel waiting in the cab. Milly's pleasure, however, was gone for the time being.

'Oh, Herbert!' she exclaimed, almost crying, as they were driving to the gardens, 'how dreadfully poor and miserable she seems! What a cold, wretched room, such a tiny bit of fire, Ethel! and she seemed afraid to poke it into a blaze, for fear the coals should burn too fast, I suppose! What can I do for her, Herbert? Do let me get her two or three little comforts.'

'And let me join too,' said Ethel.

Herbert said they should send whatever they liked; and then comforted Milly by promising to interest Mrs. Neville on Miss Horne's behalf, so that Milly might feel sure she would not need a friend when she was gone.

After leaving the gardens, they drove to Fortnum and Mason, where both Milly and Ethel laid out all the money they possessed in little comforts and delicacies for the poor invalid. They bought things of which Milly remembered she had been very fond; such as good chocolate for breakfast, arrowroot, etc. etc. Meanwhile Herbert

undertook to procure some good port wine and a barrel of oysters, which, together with the girls' purchases, he sent off at once by a special messenger, accompanied by a very kind letter, which pleased Miss Horne, and did her almost as much good as the more substantial comforts. This done, Milly's thoughts once more turned to the coming pantomime; and no words could do justice to the rapturous state of excitement in which she and Ethel took their seats at the theatre, and listened to the overture to Aladdin.

And when the curtain rose!! As Harry said next day to his grandmother, 'It was a jolly good pantomime, Silver-hair; but the greatest fun was watching Milly and Ethel. How they did stare and laugh, to be sure!'

Laugh! Yes, indeed they did. Milly never forgot that first pantomime; it was such pure unmixed enjoyment, and she never enjoyed another in the same degree. The next day was their last in London, and was spent at the Crystal Palace, where they wandered about for hours wondering and admiring. The following morning, by eleven o'clock, they were safely packed in a lady's carriage *en route* for Elworthy, and their short but happy visit to London was at an end.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON BOARD THE 'UNA.'

IT was settled for the wedding to take place the latter end of February, so that Milly was looking forward to seeing her brother again at no very distant period, as she was to come up to London for the important event. Disappointment, however, was in store for her; for, when the time came, she was laid up with so severe a cold on her chest, that the doctor would not hear of her leaving home. In vain Milly begged and prayed him to relent, protesting in a hoarse voice that it would not hurt her, she would wrap up so warmly, and take such extra care of herself; he was inflexible; and, with the worst grace in the world, she was at length obliged to submit to what really was a very sharp disappointment. Herbert and Agnes wrote long consolatory letters, and Harry, who, much to his indignation, had been sent to a lady's school at Brighton, gave her a long account of the ceremony.

'It was not much fun,' he wrote, in large straggling characters. 'Silverhair cried orfully, and gave me wet kisses! Scool is very horid, but I don't mind much, as I get jamb for tea sometimes! Papa says we are all to go in his yott

in June; won't that be a lark? I hop every boddy will be very ill but me, and then I shall laugh at you all!'

This promise of a cruise in the 'Una' was the only thing which at all consoled Milly. Herbert and Agnes were to return from Rome at the end of May, and early in June were to come round to S—— in their yacht, and take Milly and Hilda on board for a two months' cruise. Olive had the option of going in Hilda's place; but feeling very uncertain of turning out a good sailor, she had wisely refused. Hilda delighted in the sea, and so did Milly, and both were looking forward with the utmost pleasure to their promised trip. The intervening months passed quickly, notwithstanding the children's impatience, for they were hard at work with their lessons; the time, therefore, did not hang heavily on their hands, and May had come and gone before they knew where they were. Mrs. Russell had yachting dresses of dark-blue serge, with nautical buttons, made for the little girls; and Herbert sent blue ribbons, marked with 'Una' in gold letters, for their white straw-hats.

'Oh, what fun it will be!' cried Milly, dancing about with delight, as she surveyed these and other preparations. 'There is a dear little cabin, with two berths, that we are to have all to ourselves, Hilda; so Herbert says. And there's another for Harry and Agnes's maid, and a large one for Herbert and Agnes, and such a nice saloon; for it's a large yacht, you know. Oh dear! I hope the wind will be favourable for bringing them round on the 5th, for Herbert said that would most likely be the day.'

On the morning of the 4th, Milly came down to breakfast full of excitement.

'Oh! Uncle Frank,' as she gave him a hug, 'how is the wind? is it right for bringing the "Una" round this way?'

'Just right,' was the reply; 'and if you'll make a very good breakfast, which seems doubtful at present, we'll walk up to the coastguard station this morning, and tell the old fellow there to look out for her, and to let us know when she's in sight.'

'Oh! thank you, thank you, Uncle Frank. Will you come, too, Hilda?'

'No, I'll stay with mamma, as it's my last day. Besides there's the packing to finish. It must be all ready by to-night, you know.'

'Oh dear! yes, so it must. Never mind, I shall have plenty of time for mine.'

'Or I'll do it for you,' said Olive.

'Oh! thank you,' Milly answered fervently; 'I should be so much obliged. All the things are on chairs in my room.'

'Oh, you untidy little mortal!' said Mrs. Russell, shaking her head at her. 'That's against rules, Milly.'

'Yes, I know,' she replied, giving her aunt about fifty kisses; 'but I'm all in a maze and daze, as poor Miss Horne used to say. I can't think of anything but the yacht, and seeing Herbert again, and going to Ireland, and—oh! it's all so jolly; only I wish we could all go.'

Mr. Russell made a wry face. 'Thank you, Miss Milly; but I know three who would be wishing themselves back again in less than an hour's time, and I'm one of them.'

'And I another,' said Olive.

Mrs. Russell was about to declare herself the third, when a man's voice was heard outside, the door opened,

and who should appear but Herbert Grant! Milly flew into his arms, almost in hysterics at the surprise; and he was greeted by the others with a volley of questions and exclamations, to which he replied that the wind being so favourable for sailing west, they had embarked a day sooner than was intended, and had arrived in harbour about six o'clock that morning.

'And now, young ladies,' he added, 'I can only give you a very short time for final preparations, for we must be off again before twelve. This wind is too good to lose; so off with you, and get everything ready as fast as possible.'

'Come up at once,' said Mrs. Russell. 'Olive, you go and help Hilda, while I am getting Milly's things ready. And, Herbert, do sit down and have some breakfast. Frank, will you look after him?'

For the next hour or so there was an indescribable bustle and excitement in the house; but at last everything was ready, a fly procured, goodbyes hastily exchanged, and by half-past eleven the yacht was boarded, Milly and Hilda's luggage quickly unpacked, and the boxes sent back on shore. Very shortly after the pretty schooner was seen sailing out of the harbour, with her white sails all set, bearing towards the west. After the first greetings were over, and the deck tolerably clear from ropes and sails, Harry volunteered to show the girls all round the yacht.

'You'd better see it now that we are in smooth water,' he said; 'for I suppose you've not found your sea legs yet.'

'As if I had ever lost mine!' cried Milly indignantly. 'You forget the sea voyage *I've* made, Master Harry.'

'Yes; but that was ages ago. Well, come along.'

'Harry's suggestion is a wise one, I think,' said Mr Grant. 'After you've seen all the cabins I should advise you to come

up on deck and sit down quietly. We shall have some pretty sailing.'

The yacht was very nicely fitted up. She was about 140 tons, and had good accommodation for her size.

'Take care of your heads,' sung out Harry, as he led the way down the companion ladder.

At the foot of it was the saloon, which, prettily decorated, and containing pictures, sofas, book-cases, and a small pianoforte, was made to look as much like a drawing-room as possible. Over the fire-place hung the well-known Art-Union print of Una and the Lion. A door opened from the saloon into Milly and Hilda's cabin, with which they were highly delighted. It was hung with a pretty rosebud chintz, and, although small, there were so many clever little contrivances for holding this, that, and the other, that there seemed plenty of room and to spare. To be sure the berths did look rather like narrow shelves to Hilda's eyes; but Milly assured her they would be delightfully comfortable, and that two foot nothing was exactly the right width for a bed.

'Stop a minute, I haven't shown you the jolliest dodge,' said Harry, as they were passing through the next cabin; 'just stand off this bit of carpet, please, I want to get it up.'

This done, he proceeded to lift up part of the floor, disclosing, to the girls' no small astonishment, a nice little bath.

'Well, that is perfect!' cried Hilda. 'Now, we've everything we can possibly want.'

Harry then took them into the other cabins, which were fitted up in the same way, and then into that portion of the vessel occupied by the captain and sailors, and taught them how to pronounce the word forecastle in true nautical style.

He had only been three days on board; but being a

sharp little fellow, was already quite a pet with the crew, who promised to make a first-rate little sailor of him. Milly and Hilda were rather disturbed to find the kitchen in the same place as where the men's hammocks were slung; but Mr. Grant told them that this was the case in every yacht, and that sailing gave one too good an appetite for dinner, to allow one to care much where it was cooked. The remainder of the afternoon was passed on deck. Milly had so much to hear and to tell, that the hours seemed to fly.

'When did you last hear from poor Miss Horne, Milly?' asked Mrs. Grant.

'Two or three days ago; she is so much better; able to take her pupils again. She said Mrs. Leigh had been just like a good fairy to her, and that she never could be grateful enough to you and Herbert.'

'Poor thing! I hadn't time to do much for her; but I knew I should leave her in good hands with mamma. She very often goes to see old Mrs. Horne, and has taught her to knit, I believe.'

'Oh yes, Miss Horne said her mother's life was a different thing now that Mrs. Leigh came so often to see her, and to read to her. She has also sold several of Mary's drawings.'

'So mamma told me. It was the greatest blessing in the world for her to have this new interest, as it has occupied so much of her time and thoughts, and prevented her fretting after Harry and me. So, you see, her kindness of heart has benefited her as much as the Hornes, in a different way.'

Then Mrs. Grant brought out her journal, and read some parts to the children. Hilda, especially, was very much interested in hearing about all the places she had seen. 'Oh! how I should like to see Milan Cathedral!'

she said, as Mrs. Grant described the beauties of its thousand white marble spires and statues.

'That was just what Herbert said, when we were there,' said Agnes, turning to her—'"How little Hilda would like this!" and when we came out of the cathedral, he bought the very best photograph he could get of it for you.'

'How kind of him!' said Hilda.

'I'll give it you after dinner; also a little present he brought you from Rome, and one for you, Milly. I hope he didn't forget to leave those for the other children at Elworthy. He took them with him this morning.'

'I remember seeing a large parcel on the chimney-piece in the dining-room,' said Hilda. 'I daresay they were in it. How pleased they will be! Do tell us what kind of presents they are.'

'Well, there is a Roman chain and locket for Mrs. Russell; a brooch in white mosaic, with a green olive branch on it, for Olive; some photographs for Miss Carey; and brooches, lockets, and Paris "gobble," as Harry calls it, for the others.'

'How kind of Cousin Herbert, to think of them all! I'm so glad he didn't forget Miss Carey.'

'He seems to have forgotten poor Uncle Frank, though,' said Milly.

'Oh no, he was not forgotten; but his present has not arrived yet. It is a bronze of one of the celebrated statues in the Vatican, and is to be sent over with some we ordered for ourselves.'

'Just what papa will like!' said Hilda; and Herbert coming up at that moment, she began shyly to thank him for his kindness in thinking of them all.

'I've brought the charts to show you where we are,' he

said, when she had finished. 'We shall be at the Isle of Wight by dinner-time, if this wind last, and the captain advises us to anchor in Alum Bay for the night. What do you say to that, Agnes?'

'It will be charming. Nothing I should like better; much pleasanter than sailing all night; and the children will get a good view of the Needles to-morrow.'

'Isn't it at Alum Bay that the sands are all of different colours?' asked Harry. 'Silverhair had a bottle filled with them; and don't you remember I spilt them one day for fun, to see if I could make them go back again into the bottle in the same pattern, but they wouldn't?'

'Of course not,' said his mother, laughing. 'Yes, there are coloured sands at Alum Bay; but they are on the rocks, and are not sands to walk upon. It will be too late to see the colours to-night; but if it's a fine day to-morrow, you will see them before we leave in the morning.'

'I remember hearing people say we were passing the Needles, very early in the morning of the day we arrived at Southampton,' said Milly. 'I couldn't think what they meant. I didn't see them, because I was in bed.'

At six o'clock they went down to dinner, nothing loth, for the sea air had given them all famous appetites. After this Mrs. Grant unpacked the presents for the two girls, with which they were highly delighted, and then Harry was sent off to bed, and the others, well wrapped up in cloaks, and thus protected from the evening dew, went up again on deck, to look at Osborne and Norris Castle, which places they were then passing. By nine o'clock Alum Bay was reached, where they found a calm haven for the night. The anchor was dropped, and all were soon fast asleep on board the little yacht.

At five o'clock on the following morning a violent noise overhead awoke Hilda. Starting up in bed, and thereby knocking her head against the cabin ceiling, she called out, 'Oh! Milly, do you hear that dreadful noise? What can be the matter?'

Milly gave a grunt at being disturbed, and said, in a sleepy voice, 'Scrubbing the deck.'

'It can't take all that thumping and bumping to clean,' said Hilda. 'Oh dear, I've given my head such a knock!'

She could get no sympathy, however, from Milly, who was sound asleep again, and so, with a resigned sigh, she lay down once more, but could not go to sleep. 'I suppose I shall get used to it in time,' she consoled herself by thinking, and, like a wise girl, she made light of her little miseries when asked by Agnes at breakfast time how she had slept, for she knew how disagreeable it is to hear complaints, especially when they cannot be remedied.

Alum Bay looked very lovely, with its many-coloured sands, and deep blue waters glistening in the sunshine, as they weighed anchor that morning. The children would have liked to have landed, and wandered about on the shore, and climbed up the hills; but the captain said, that if they wished to reach Portland that day, they must start at once, the wind being very light; and so the inland scramble had to be put off for another occasion.

'I wonder why these rocks were called "Needles!"' said Milly, as they sailed by them, and were admiring their picturesque appearance, and the numerous sea-gulls hovering above them. 'They aren't a bit like their name.'

'I suppose they were once upon a time,' answered Herbert; 'but, being made of chalk, they have gradually been worn

away into their present shape. Granite rocks wouldn't have changed.'

The breeze with which they started did not hold out even as long as the captain had imagined. They were still some miles off St. Alban's Head, a fine headland, some twenty miles from Portland, when it died entirely away, leaving them perfectly motionless for several hours, 'a painted ship upon a painted ocean.'

It was trying work to Harry's quicksilver nature; he did not like it at all, voting it slow work.

'There's no help for it,' said his stepfather; 'these little *contretemps* constantly occur in yachting, and must be borne patiently; there might be a nasty roll, and then it would be twice as hard to bear. Ask one of the men to set you up a whiting-line, Harry. Who knows, you might catch one or two whitings, and we have no fish for dinner; anyhow, it will amuse you.'

'Oh yes, that will be fun! I'll ask the Brigand to rig up a line for me.'

The 'Brigand' was one of the sailors, a short good-natured man, with a black curly beard, and black eyes twinkling with fun and good-humour. Harry had given him the name at first-sight, as, he said, he was the image of one of the robbers who attacked Queen Margaret in Hexham Forest, as represented in the woodcut in *Little Arthur's History of England;* and he never lost the nick-name, although the only murderous intents he was ever known to display, was a great delight in baiting the children's hooks when fishing. Two or three whitings were foolish enough to allow themselves to be caught, and others were hooked and escaped, so that the fishing proved a great resource to all three children, and whiled away the

time famously. After dinner a nice little breeze sprang up, the sails began to fill, and a pleasant rippling sound told them that they were at last making way. Portland Bay was soon reached, and a convenient anchorage secured inside the breakwater. There can scarcely be a nicer place than Portland to stay in for two or three days on board a yacht; the rock itself is most picturesque, and the neighbourhood abounds in objects of interest, such as Chesil Beach, Lulworth Cove, etc. Hilda thought it a very charming scene as, the morning after their arrival, she came up on deck for her usual walk before breakfast. There were five or six yachts in the bay, with blue, red, or white ensigns flying, as the case might be; some with awnings set, and all in Sunday trim; one or two men-of-war, and several trading vessels. Being Sunday, there was no work going on, either on the breakwater or in the quarries. Everything was perfectly still, the sun was shining brightly on the deep blue waters, and flocks of beautiful sea-gulls were hovering about the different ships.

'Where shall we go to church?' asked Herbert, at breakfast. 'On shore, or on board the flag-ship?'

'The flag-ship,' was the universal answer, and accordingly the gig was lowered at the proper time, and they were rowed to H.M.S. ——, where service was to be performed. One of the officers received them very politely, and took them to a lower-deck, where several parties from different yachts were already assembled. An impromptu reading-desk, which also served as a pulpit, covered with a black and white flag, stood in the centre; on one side sat the Admiral and all the ladies, on the other the gentlemen visitors, and officers, while on all sides were several rows of men and marines, the former looking very clean

and neat in their dark-blue jackets, with nice wide collars turned down over them. The singing was particularly good. It is to be feared that Harry's attention, caught by a particularly savoury smell, very often wandered off to the far background down the deck, where the cooks in their white caps might be seen running to and fro, preparing the different dinners; but, on the whole, he was very good and quiet. After service, the Admiral invited them to stay to luncheon, and go over the ship; an invitation gladly accepted, Mr. and Mrs. Grant happening to have met friends on board, and the children being delighted at the idea of seeing a man-of-war. The Admiral took them first into his own cabin, which was the very picture of comfort and luxury—delightful arm-chairs and sofas, photographs, pictures, statuettes, flowers, and innumerable nick-nacks, forming the prettiest drawing-room she had ever seen; so thought Hilda. He was a very kind old man, and insisted on showing the children round the ship himself, and took the trouble to explain everything to them that they did not understand. As they passed by the midshipmen's mess-room, the dinner was just going up. 'What do they have for dinner?' asked Harry, and, to satisfy his curiosity, the Admiral called a little middy to him, and asked the question in a good-humoured manner.

'Roast ducks, fore-quarter lamb, curried rabbits, mutton cutlets, pigeon pie, asparagus, potatoes, and a fruit-pudding,' was the prompt reply.

'What a nice dinner!' said Milly; and, turning to the Admiral, Herbert said, laughing—

'Rather a change from Captain Marryat's days of the cock-pit, salt pork, and biscuit!'

When the ship had been thoroughly explored, they re-

turned to the Admiral's cabin, where Mr. Grant and the rest of the party were sitting. Then came luncheon; after which goodbyes were exchanged, and our party returned to their own snug little yacht.

'Who will go on shore with me to church?' asked Herbert, somewhat later in the afternoon.

Milly and Hilda offered their company; but Mrs. Grant said she should stay quietly on board, and read to Harry, who, she thought, had done enough for that day.

Church being over earlier than they had expected, Herbert proposed a walk on the breakwater; and there being still a little time to spare, before the boat was to meet them, Milly coaxed him to let them have a scramble among the rocks, to see if they could find any curiosities. Here they stayed till the boat picked them up, collecting a few shells and curious stones, but chiefly looking into the clear, deep pools of water, converted into beautiful ruby, emerald, and amethyst caves, by the rose-coloured, deep green, and purple seaweeds, which lined the sides of the rocks. Here and there, some only half-opened, others fully so, were fringed anemones of different colours,—dark red, green and yellow,—flowers of the sea, as they have been justly called; and, swimming about, were enormous white jelly-fish, which, when stirred up by Herbert's stick, began barking like dogs, emitting sepia from their mouths.

'Those are dangerous fellows to come across in bathing,' said Mr. Grant. 'Their sting is so painful, and has, I believe, been known even to poison people.'

'This has been the most delicious day that ever was!' said Milly enthusiastically, as they rowed back to the yacht. 'What a lot we shall have to put into our journals to-night, Hilda!'

'Yes, indeed; and I must write home a long account of it as well. I hope we shall find some letters at the Post-office to-morrow. I am longing to know how they all are. We've seen and done so much these last two days, that it seems to me more like a week since we left home!'

CHAPTER XVII.

HILDA'S LETTER.

THE next resting-place was Plymouth, whither they sailed on the following day, which, the wind being fair, they were enabled to reach in the evening. The scenery was very pretty, as they coasted along; and, by the aid of writing, working, reading, sketching, and talking, the day flew by almost too quickly for the inmates of the 'Una.'

The captain anchored in a lovely spot in Plymouth Sound, commanding a fine view of the breakwater, forts, and shipping, as well as of the distant town and Hoe, close under the overhanging green woods of Mount Edgcombe.

'We must go to market this morning,' said Mr. Grant next day. 'I've ordered the gig at eleven o'clock. I suppose you'll all like to stretch your legs a bit on shore?'

All were willing to do so but Harry, who said he should stick to the ship, and fish with the Brigand in the dingy; and, after a few maternal cautions, and many promises on the part of his companion that he should be well taken care of, he was allowed to please himself.

The first visit on landing was to the post-office; the

next, to a library, where newspapers of the last two or three days were eagerly inquired for.

'You'll do the marketing much better than I shall, Herbert,' said Mrs. Grant; 'so, suppose you go off with the two girls, while I stay here, and read my letters and the papers.'

'Very well,' he replied. 'Come along then, girls; I hope you're a judge of chickens, for I'm sure I'm not.'

The marketing was very great fun, so the children thought. One of the sailors followed them about with a huge basket, into which purchases of every description were placed; so that, by the time it was full, it presented a somewhat extraordinary appearance, containing as it did two pair of soles, a live lobster—which tried to eat the soles all the way home, so Milly said—a leg of lamb, several pounds of butter, unlimited strawberries, cucumbers, artichokes, bread, flowers, medicine, photographs, fishing-hooks, newspapers, etc., etc.; all which articles were not packed neatly and covered over, but put into the basket quite at random, sticking out on all sides, and presenting a very ludicrous appearance; so that, while going down to the boat, a small crowd followed the curious-looking cargo, and its unfortunate bearer had to undergo a large amount of chaff and feeble jokes from the small boys of Plymouth.

On returning to the yacht they found that Harry and the Brigand had had a very successful fishing expedition, as was proved by the dish of fish served up for luncheon. Among the many purchases in Plymouth, was a Murray's Hand-book for Devonshire and Cornwall, which Milly and Hilda studied assiduously the best part of the afternoon, in order to plan an excursion for the following day. At

last they settled that to row up the river Tamar, and to pic-nic at Cothele, would be what they should most enjoy; and Mrs. Grant being of the same mind, it was so arranged. But we will take the liberty of learning the history of this day, and of the two or three following ones, from a letter Hilda wrote home to Olive, on the way from Penzance to Tenby:—

'YACHT "UNA," *June 9th*, 18—.

'MY DEAREST OLIVE,—We have been seeing so much the last few days, that it has been impossible to write home very often; but I think I shall have plenty of time to-day, as we are getting on very slowly, the wind being against us, and there seems no chance of reaching Tenby till to-morrow morning. I don't think I have written to you since our excursion up the Tamar to Cothele. It was such a long way to row, that we were out all day long; and the poor sailors were so tired, coming home, we thought they would never bring us in at all. However, Cousin Herbert helped them in turns, and now and then Agnes (she says I may call her so) took an oar and helped a little. But this is what we did coming home; I must tell you what it was like going. The first two or three miles up the river we saw nothing but men-of-war, colliers, steamboats, and old hulks of large ships, some white, some black, some yellow. Many are used for different purposes, but some are quite empty, and Agnes said she thought it would be very nice to fit them up roughly, and make them into convalescent homes for poor town-people in want of sea air. There is plenty of room in them, and so much to see all round, that they wouldn't be dull. Soon we passed under the famous Saltash bridge, which was built by Brunel. It has his name on it in large letters at one end, with the

date, 1859 I think. The river was much prettier after this, and we passed a lovely place called Pentilie, where there was a castle, and such quantities of dear old and young herons, standing about on one leg. Cothele was only a little way farther; and here we landed, and carried our basket up a very steep, pretty avenue leading to the house, and found a nice shady place to pic-nic in. Then we walked up to the house, which is an old grey gabled building, built in Henry the Seventh's time. The hall was a funny-looking old place, hung round with coats of mail, armour, and stag horns, and there were some very curious chairs in it, with 1501 carved on the backs of them. There wasn't very much to see in the house except tapestry, gloomy-looking passages, and arched doorways —oh! and a little room in which Charles II. once slept; but why he was poked up in the garrets I can't think. After this we wandered about in the wood, and found such beautiful ferns and wild-flowers, and Agnes made a very pretty sketch.

'I mustn't forget to tell you about the Eddystone light-house, which we went to see before leaving Plymouth. If it hadn't been very calm weather indeed, we shouldn't have been able to have approached at all near it, as there is nearly always a violent ground swell round the rocks where it is built. One of our sailors said that this is in consequence of a peculiarity in the rocks. They all slope and point to the north-east, and continue to do so for many fathoms below the surface of the sea; their inclined sides are thus exposed to the rough tides and storms of the Atlantic, which cause the continual eddies from which the Eddystone derives its name. Until the year 1696, it was thought impossible to put up a lighthouse on this rock; but accidents

and disasters were so constantly happening, that at length a trial was made, and a Mr. Winstanley erected one which he thought was perfectly safe, and he used often to say that he should like to prove it by being shut up in it during a violent storm. He had his wish; for one day, when he happened to be there, a fearful storm came on, and as it grew more and more violent, the lighthouse began to shake and sway to and fro! Poor Mr. Winstanley soon saw that it was not strong enough to stand against the tempest, and he made every signal of distress he could invent to bring a boat from shore, but not one would venture out. In the morning there was not a sign of the lighthouse visible. It had been swept into the sea during the night, and poor Mr. Winstanley perished with it. Wasn't it a horrible fate? The next lighthouse was destroyed by fire; but the present one, which was put up in 1759, seems perfectly safe. It is built entirely of stone, and is the most wretched place to live in you ever saw. The windows are mere loopholes, and hardly let in any light, and the door is no larger than a ship's gun port. We didn't land, but sat and looked at it from the boat. Two men live in it, and are relieved by two others every six weeks. How they can stay so long I can't imagine; their only amusement is fishing, and that they can only do in very fine weather. All they get is £20 a year and their food, while on duty. On the stone which was the last to be fixed of the lighthouse, is written, "24th August 1759. Laus Deo." Cousin Herbert said he was afraid that the four men who lived there could not feel inclined to echo the last words, even if they know their meaning.

'Well, now you will want to hear about Falmouth, where we went after leaving Plymouth; but I haven't much to tell

you about it, as it is a very dirty, uninteresting place. The harbour is rather pretty, and was full of foreign barks; but the captain had told us so much about its beauty (safe anchorage representing that to him), that we all felt disappointed on arriving; and when we went on shore to do our marketing, we could hardly find a decent shop. It began to drizzle, and you would have laughed to have seen us picking our way, like ducks, in and out the dirty gutters of the straggling High Street, for there was no pavement to walk on. Agnes wanted a white gull's breast for her hat, and seeing one in the window of a small barber's shop, she went in to ask the price. The first thing she saw on opening the door, was a great big Cornishman being shaved, and there was such a frightful smell of rancid pomatum, soap, and oil, that she rushed out again without saying a word. The barber, however, came after her, leaving his poor victim with his mouth and nose covered with the dreadful-smelling soap, and asked what she wanted. The gull's breast was then bought, and cost 2s. 6d., which we all thought very cheap, as it was such a beautifully white one. As there was nothing to be seen in Falmouth, Cousin Herbert suddenly proposed we should go to Truro, and we found out that the next train would start in ten minutes. The proper omnibus had gone to the station; but we saw an empty one in the next street, and jumped into it, Cousin Herbert calling out, "Station, quick, only five minutes to spare!"

'"All right, sir," said the conductor, "we'll try for it. Now then, Jim, fire away."

'Jim lashed his horses, and away we flew up the narrow winding street, every one getting out of our way in a great fright. I think Milly enjoyed it; but Agnes and I were

dreadfully frightened. We turned the corners so sharply, and swung backwards and forwards so violently, that we were knocked off our seats, and thought every moment that the old rickety omnibus must come to pieces. Cousin Herbert clutched hold of the conductor's blouse, and shouted to him to make the coachman stop; but there was such a dreadful noise that he couldn't make him hear a single word. We went on faster and faster, for the train was actually at the station, and just about to start. At last we stopped, with a fearful jerk, and were almost lifted out by two guards and three porters, who were standing, open-mouthed, waiting for us. Somehow or other the tickets were taken, and somehow or other we got into a railway carriage; but Agnes and I were so jarred and frightened, that we could neither stand or speak at first. However, we soon recovered; and I must now tell you about poor Agnes's feather. Milly asked if she might look at it, as we were going along, and, when the paper was opened, to our astonishment we saw a dirty, grey-looking thing, instead of the snow-white breast which had been bought.

'"Why, how extraordinary!" said Agnes, staring at it; and Cousin Herbert burst out laughing, saying—

'"Oh, you have been nicely *gulled*, indeed! Why, it was only made to look white by being stuck all over with powder, which the knocking about in the omnibus has shaken off, of course."

'And so it had; the paper was full of powder! Agnes was so disgusted that she tossed the whole thing, feather and all, out of the window—the best place for it.

'There was very little to be seen in Truro. The church was nice, but was shown by a horrid woman, who began

to call out loudly for her "privilege" before Cousin Herbert had time to get anything out of his purse even. Altogether, we were not sorry to leave Falmouth, which we did two days ago, arriving at Penzance about five o'clock that same afternoon. We had great fun fishing from the side of the yacht after dinner. Some of the fish we caught were all over beautiful colours, just like the enchanted fish in the story in the Arabian Nights.

'We enjoyed the next day very much. Cousin Herbert said he thought a land excursion would be a nice change for us; and so ordered a carriage, and, having rowed ashore, we got into it, and went off to the Land's End, taking our luncheon with us. We passed through some lovely lanes, with the trees meeting overhead, making beautiful green bowers for a long way down. It was very pretty to see the light flickering through the branches on to the road beneath. Then we came to a sort of wild moorland, with rough stone walls on one side, and on the other banks covered with ferns, foxgloves, honeysuckles, beautiful purple heather, and bright blue scabious. Then we arrived at a very dirty, poverty-stricken village, and here we got out to see the Logan Stone. An old man, exactly like the picture in True's book of "the man all tattered and torn, who kissed the maiden all forlorn," acted as our guide, and talked, or rather jabbered the whole way without stopping. First, he told us he could see we had come "from off the say," because we looked so "healthy like." I daresay we do, being copper-coloured by the sun. Then he said he had seen our yacht come in the day before, and that it was the "beautifullest creetur' he had ever set eyes on." Cousin Herbert said he was a regular old humbug, for, unless he could see through two

or three headlands, he couldn't possibly have seen the yacht come in.

'After passing through several fields, we climbed over a low stone wall, and suddenly came out on *such* a lovely view! I did so long for mamma, and all of you. We stood on a perfect carpet of bright heather and thyme, and all round us was the sea, with the Lizard Point stretching out in the far distance,—here and there white sails, making the view look so pretty. On one side, we looked down on such a beautiful little bay, with brilliant white sands, and the sea coming in like one great piece of emerald! All round it were rough granite rocks, all shapes and sizes, some very grand and bold, jutting out into the sea. In front of us were some huge crags, piled up on the top of one another, among which we had to scramble up and down before we could find the Logan Stone. I was rather disappointed with it, as it doesn't stand by itself, as I had expected, but on the top of other and larger stones. The guide made it move slightly; but little Harry, who was with us, was very much disappointed not to see it rock up and down, as he had imagined it would have done, and he began to wish he had "stuck to the ship," instead of coming on a stupid "shore excursion." He is such an absurd little fellow, just like Ethel described him to be!

'When we went back to the inn, an old woman there took us into the small sanded parlour, to show us an old-fashioned coloured print of the Logan Stone being put back into its place, after having been blown over by a hurricane, a great many years ago. Since then, the captain of a revenue cutter was foolish enough to make a bet that he would overturn it, with the help of his boat's crew.

'Milly's View of the Sea.'—*Page* 184.

He won his bet, but was compelled by law to put it up again, and this cost him so much money, that, in the end, the poor man was ruined.

'Well, then, we got into the carriage again, to drive to the Land's End; and, by this time, we felt dreadfully hungry, and set to work at once on our luncheon; but all the knives, forks, and glasses having been forgotten, we had to eat our cold lamb with our fingers, much to Harry's delight, and make frantic attempts to drink claret and water out of a bottle while the carriage was bumping down hill at a fearful pace, for they drive very fast in these parts.

'At the Land's End we again got out to explore, and oh! it was so beautiful. I quite longed to be going to stay for a few days at the funny-looking little inn, perched on the top of the promontory. It is quite impossible to try and describe the beauty of the rocks; but I send you some photographs, which will give you a little idea of them. In one place a large conical rock stood up by itself, perfectly separated from the others, looking like an old castle, with the white surf beating up against its base. Near the extreme point of the Land's End there is a little house with "First and last house of refreshment in England, kept by John Richardson," printed on it. It very nearly ceased to be either the one or the other last winter, for the owner told us that the roof was completely carried off by the gales. Much as we enjoyed the Land's End, we were very glad to get back into the carriage again, for Harry nearly frightened us out of our senses by the way he scrambled about the rocks. He was perfectly wild, and wouldn't mind a word that was said to him. Poor Agnes was so frightened, and at last Cousin Herbert got quite angry, and made him take hold of his hand, and walk about quietly with us; but he

didn't like it at all, and was always trying to slip away by himself, so that we were very glad to get him safe into the carriage again.

'Next day (yesterday) was Sunday, which we spent at Penzance, and this morning we started very early, hoping to reach Tenby before dark; but the wind has now quite dropped, and we are not moving an inch onwards, only rolling about from side to side, the sails flapping, every plank creaking, and the boom coming over with a rush, first on one side, then on the other, so that it is very difficult to write, and I must say good-bye. Poor Agnes is not very well, and Milly looks very white. Don't you envy us? Lucky for you that you are not here.—Your affectionate sister, 'HILDA RUSSELL.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

STILL ON BOARD.

'TENBY, *June*, 18—.

'MY DEAREST ETHEL,—It is your turn to have a letter to-day, as Hilda wrote last time to Olive. We are still here, as the wind is so high we can't get away; and although we like Tenby itself very much, we don't at all like the nasty little harbour we are in; but it is better than being at anchor in the bay, where we did nothing but roll about backwards and forwards all day long. It was rather dreadful getting here, as the wind was very high, and dead against us, and all we did was to pitch, toss, and roll about all night long. Hilda and I couldn't keep our bed-clothes on; and if we hadn't held on very tight, we should have rolled out of our berths. Every now and then came a grating noise, as if the ship had struck upon a rock. Poor Agnes was very ill, and so were Harry and the maid. The captain said it was a very nasty night indeed. I think he was quite frightened, for he doesn't like rough weather. It was just as bad in the morning. Hilda and I managed to dress somehow or other, and tumbled up on deck, where we sat huddled up in cloaks and rugs, every now and then drenched by the great big waves which came over the deck. It was

such fun to see the sailors ducking, and trying to get out of the way when they were coming, for their end of the ship was much wetter than ours. All our men had on their very worst bad-weather clothes, and sou'-westers, and were paddling about with bare feet, looking so wretched, poor things! Sometimes one had to climb up the ropes to do something to the sails, and once or twice a great gust of wind came and very nearly blew him off; he could hardly hold on tight enough. It was very lucky that we were none of us very hungry those two days coming from Penzance, for our only joint, a leg of lamb, had been carried off by the sea from our larder over the traffrail! All our uncooked food is hung there to keep it good.

'We began to see the houses at Tenby about two o'clock, and were at anchor by three. Then we got into the gig, rowed to shore, and went straight to the hotel, and ordered some dinner. Oh! it was so nice to be on shore again, after all that fearful tossing about. After dinner, Agnes, who had a bad headache, lay down on the sofa, and we went out for a walk with Herbert; first paying a visit to the market, as our cupboard was bare at home. The old Welsh women dress so funnily—short dresses, with little woollen shawls crossed over their shoulders, and high, black, broad-brimmed, steeple-crowned hats, with white caps underneath. They come in to Tenby every market-day with their large baskets, and stand about the streets with their jolly old donkies and panniers, looking very pic—you know what I mean, but I can't spell the word, it's too long; besides I must leave off now, as we are going for a scramble. Agnes says she will finish my letter.'

'Milly has handed over her untidy scrawl to me, my dear Ethel, and says I am to finish it, but that I needn't

trouble to correct any faults, as she assures me you understand her bad spelling better than you would her good spelling. I wonder what Miss Carey will say to that!

'We are all enjoying ourselves very much, now that the dreadful pitching and tossing is over. I see that Milly has given you an account of it; but she hasn't told you about the Wolf Rock (near the Land's End), off which we were becalmed in a heavy swell for eleven hours! It derives its name, as one of the sailors told us, from its being hollow; so that the sea, beating up against it, makes a roaring noise, which can be heard for many miles. Milly and Hilda are much better sailors than I am; however, I hope to improve; and unless it is *very* rough, I am pretty comfortable. We shall wait here till the wind is favourable for crossing over to Ireland; and we all like Tenby so much, that we don't mind the delay. The rock scenery is very beautiful here; but the inland country is uninteresting, bad roads, dwarfed hedges, and glaring whitewashed walls being the chief features. But we are quite content to look seawards at the pretty islands and distant cliffs. The sands are magnificent, so firm and wide; all kinds of amusements go on there—croquet, cricket, donkey and pony riding. The poor over-ridden hacks are made to go full pelt up and down for hours together. I feel quite sorry for them, and now and then not a little frightened lest some one should be run over; but the poor creatures seem to know their business better than their riders do, and manage to steer clear of every one, notwithstanding the wild pace they are made to go. Near these sands is St. Catherine's Rock, a very pretty island with steep cliffs and grassy slopes at the top, on which are the ruins of a chapel. Underneath there is a beautiful cavern—the Mermaid's Cave—abounding in shells

and sea-weeds. At low tide this island can be reached from the sands, and yesterday Milly and Hilda found some wonderful treasures there. We have been obliged to bring the yacht into the tiny harbour, and she is now made fast alongside the small stone pier, that forms the lounging-place of all the idle and curious among the Tenbyites. The second night after we arrived the gale increased so much that a pilot boarded us, and insisted on taking us in (which he did most certainly, by charging us five guineas in the end); but although we are saved the rolling about, we have a fearful smell of mud to endure at low water; and the curiosity of the aborigines, who assemble in large numbers on the quay, and peer into our cabins, is decidedly a nuisance. So are the steamers, which start very early in the morning, loaded with excursionists singing hymns! However, we are obliged to make the best of everything.

'I must tell you of a very exciting race which took place the other day, between our gig and the cutter. Cousin Herbert thought the men would be all the better for a little amusement, so he offered two prizes—£1 for the first, and 10s. for the second. Each boat has a different crew, four men a-piece, and one to steer. Harry was highly excited at the idea; but all his sympathies were in favour of the cutter, of which his favourite Brigand is stroke-oar. We went up on deck, and when all was ready, Herbert fired off a gun, and away went the boats, the two steersmen bobbing up and down, to mark the time, like mandarins. We watched them with great interest; and a great many people were collected on the pier, and cheered them tremendously as they rowed round the boat which marked the extent of their course. It was settled that the cutter should be allowed two minutes at

the end, as she is a much heavier and slower boat than the gig; and although the latter passed her and came in first, the cutter followed in less than eleven seconds, thereby winning the race. Harry was jumping about with excitement the whole time, cheering on his friend the Brigand until he was quite hoarse, and he nearly clapped his little hands off with delight at his success. The gig's crew didn't much like being defeated; but their disappointment was soon drowned in some rum punch!

'And now, good-bye, my dear little Ethel. Tell Mrs. Russell, with my kind regards, that both Hilda and Milly are very well, and as brown as berries.—Affectionately yours,

'AGNES GRANT.'

The wind changed suddenly on the following day, to a favourable quarter for crossing over to Ireland, and no time was lost in getting under weigh. A hurried visit was paid to the market, and, a very short time after, the pretty little 'Una' was sailing out of the harbour, and Tenby, with its beautiful cliffs, rocks, and sands, soon faded out of sight, and so did very soon all trace of land, leaving nothing but the 'broad, broad sea' in view. It was warm and calm, however, so that the afternoon was spent pleasantly enough sitting on deck.

'Now is the time for telling us about Una and the lion,' said Milly to her brother; 'you promised you would the first calm day at sea.'

'Oh yes,' joined in Hilda; 'we want to know the story of those pictures in the cabin so much. Did you choose the name for the yacht, Cousin Herbert?'

'Yes, I had always been very fond of Spenser's *Faerie*

Queen, and it is in that poem that the story of Una is contained. I saw those two prints in a shop window one day at Ryde, and thought they would be very appropriate to hang in the saloon. I must fetch the book if I am to tell you the story.'

'Let me get it,' said Hilda; 'I know where it is.'

'First of all,' said Herbert, when she returned, 'I must tell you that the poem itself is in the form of an allegory, and consists of six books, each of which is supposed to celebrate some particular virtue. You know that in days of old it was the custom for kings to give an annual banquet, which was attended by brave knights who wished to be sent on adventures, according to the temper of the times; the following year, if still alive, they returned to recount their achievements before the court; sometimes they had killed famous robbers, or sacked castles, or rescued distressed maidens, etc., etc. I suppose Spenser thought the idea a poetical one, and he took it for the subject of his great poem, only, in honour to Queen Elizabeth, in whose reign he lived, he called the sovereign "the Faerie Queen," and caused her to hold a splendid feast which lasted twelve days, and on each of these days twelve complaints were laid before her, and twelve knights sent forth on adventures, and these knights are supposed to be the twelve virtues. The poem was to have consisted of twelve books, but Spenser only lived to finish six.

'The story of Una occurs in the first book, which contains the adventures of Holiness, or the Red Cross Knight. Una is Truth. The first canto relates how the Faerie Queen sends them forth together, having given to the knight the task of killing "a dragon horrible and stern," viz. Error, who inhabited an enormous wood. Una is described as "a lovely

lady," who sat upon "a lovely ass more white than snow," and "by her in a line, a milk-white lamb she led."

> "So pure and innocent as that same lamb,
> She was in life, and every virtuous lore."'

It would take too long to repeat in the same manner as Herbert told it, the pretty story of Una and the lion,—how the 'fayre ladye' travelled on with Holiness, and how they were forced to seek shelter in a shady grove on account of a terrible storm that arose;—how they lost their way, and wandered on and on, getting further and further into the forest, till at length they found themselves at the entrance of the cave in which Error dwelt;—how the bold knight, at the risk of his own life, slew the dreadful dragon;—how, on leaving the forest, they were met by the wicked magician Archimago, or Falsehood, who by his wiles succeeded in separating the two companions, Holiness and Truth;—how the knight deserted Una, who rode after him weeping and wailing for days and days, until, too tired to ride any longer, she got off her slow steed, and lay down on the grass to rest;—and then how suddenly out of the thick wood rushed forth a furious lion, hunting for prey, who seeing Una, 'with gaping mouth at her ran greedily, but on being brought face to face with her pure beauty, was so mastered by it that he became perfectly tame, and

> 'Kist her weary feet,
> And lickt her lily hands with fawning tongue;'—

and how the lion would not leave her, but travelled on by her side, guarding her from all danger, keeping watch over her while she slept, and obeying her commands when

awake,—Truth and Courage being thus united,—till one day, in defending her in one of the many dangers she underwent, he was killed, and she left without her noble champion;—finally, how Una at length found her knight penitent for the wrong he had done her, and how they were married.

'And now,' said Mr. Grant as he finished the story, 'having kept my promise, and spun you this long yarn, I must go and study the chart, and see if I can find out where we are, and if we are going right.'

'And I'll pull up the mackerel line,' said Harry; 'there must be a fish on it by this time;' but, as usual, his hopes were disappointed, for, notwithstanding the tempting bait—a piece of old tobacco-pipe—the mackerel were seldom or never foolish enough to allow themselves to be caught.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRACTICAL JOKE, AND ITS RESULTS.

WE will now leave the yacht on its way to Ireland, and return for a short time to Elworthy, and the party assembled there.

'What is to be the fun on your birth-day, Ethel?' asked Maurice Clive, who was staying with the Russells, as he, Ethel, Rhoda, and Sibbie were sitting out of doors under the large cedar tree on the lawn one hot day in July.

'A pic-nic. Oh, do have a pic-nic, Ethie!' cried Rhoda. 'I've never been to one, and I'm so well now; and it's so hot that mamma couldn't mind my going.'

'Let us choose a place, then, near the sea,' suggested Maurice, 'so that some of us can go in a boat.'

'Yes, yes!' called out Sybil, jumping up and clapping her hands, 'it will be so jolly to go in a boat! You'll let me come with you; won't you, Maurice, dear?'

'All right,' he answered; 'only you must promise not to behave like a piece of indiarubber the whole time.'

The matter was afterwards discussed with the elders; and, after some deliberation, a charming little cove in

the bay, which could be reached by land as well as by sea, was fixed upon as the spot where the pic-nic was to take place. Maurice, Ethel, and Sybil announced their intention of going in the boat; and Mr. Russell, in order to take care of them, but not in any way to please himself, agreed to accompany them.

Gertrude and Violet were to be of the party, and the day was looked forward to with the utmost anxiety by the children. It came at last, cloudless and hot, with just sufficient wind to carry the little sailing-boat to the cove. The land party, who had to make a long circuit, had already started, and the others were all assembled on the beach, about to embark, when a servant came running down with a letter, marked immediate, for Mr. Russell.

'This *is* unfortunate, my dear children!' he exclaimed on reading it. 'I am called away to see a farmer's wife who is very ill, and I must lose no time in going.'

The three faces round him wore a very blank expression.

'How tiresome!' cried Sibbie.

'The only thing to be done,' continued her father, 'is to charter a fly, and send you off by road. You will arrive very soon after the others.'

But at this proposition they all exclaimed in dismay, begging and imploring Mr. Russell to let them still go by water.

'It's so calm,' pleaded Maurice, 'we can't come to any harm, and I'll take every care of the girls; besides, we've old Jack and his son with us.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Russell, 'I am afraid I can't trust you alone.'

'Oh yes, dear papa, please do; we'll be so careful and steady,' begged Ethel, with tears in her eyes; while the practical Sibbie, flying down to meet old Jack, who was coming up the beach, seized him by the arm, imploring him 'to ask papa to let them go, and to tell him that they would be quite safe.'

Old Jack did his best, and it ended in Mr. Russell giving way, not very readily, and against his better judgment; but he was in a hurry to obey the summons sent him, and his soft heart was not proof against the children's disappointed faces. So he saw them into the boat, and, after many repeated cautions on his side and promises on theirs, wished them goodbye and a happy day, and hurried off to the bedside of his sick parishioner.

'Now then, Jack, let's be off at once, or we shall be late,' said Maurice.

'Ay, ay, all right, master,' said the old man. 'There's plenty of time; never fear, we'll be there long before the carriage. Now, little misses, please to sit on this side, cos I want to get at them ropes. Would you like a mackerel line out, Master Maurice?'

'Yes, let's have one; we shall be going just about the right pace.'

'What jolly fun to fish!' cried Sibbie in ecstasies, jumping up and dancing about.

'Now do sit quiet, Sibbie!' implored Ethel. 'You'll be out of the boat in a minute, if you jump about so. You promised papa to be careful, you know.'

'Oh, don't bother so, Ethel; you spoil all the fun. I'm not going to tumble over; besides, Maurice would fish me out if I did. Wouldn't you, Maurice, dear?'

'Oh, you were not born to be drownded, Sib; nought's never in danger. Don't you know that? However, you may as well sit still, and not tumble over, as we don't want a moist, unpleasant body in the boat.'

Sibbie tried to box his ears; and again Ethel had to exert her authority, and beseech Maurice not to excite her.

'Here, you little torment, sit there, and hold the end of this mackerel line; but don't haul it up unless you feel a very suspicious twitter, or you'll get precious wet. I'm going to rig up another.'

The hopes of catching a fish kept Sybil amused for some time; and all three children were enjoying the sail to their heart's content, wishing it could last the whole day, when, to their dismay, old Jack informed them that they were just opposite the little cove, and in a very few minutes would arrive at their destination.

'Oh, what an awful bore!' exclaimed Maurice. 'Why, we've been no time at all; and the others won't get there for ever so long. There's not a sign of them,' he continued, looking through his little pocket-telescope. 'What a sell, to be there so much too soon!'

'Why not stand out a little longer, sir?' suggested Dick, Jack's son. 'We can tack whenever you like.'

'No, no,' said Ethel, 'we had better not, Maurice. Papa wouldn't like us to go any further.'

'Oh, do let us have some more sailing!' cried Sybil. 'Don't go in yet; it's so delicious, and I *must* catch a fish.'

'What do you say, Jack?' asked Maurice, turning to the old man. 'It seems a pity to go in at once, as the

others haven't arrived yet, and won't either for some time.'

'Just as you and the little ladies like, sir. In course, there's no manner of reason why you shouldn't stand out a little longer; it's safe enough.'

'We had better not,' still said Ethel. 'I am sure papa and mamma would rather we landed. We can scramble about on shore, Sibbie, dear; it will be just as good fun.'

'Oh no, it won't; not half so much. Don't be cross, Ethie. Do let us stop out a little longer; what can it matter? and it's *so* nice.'

'I really don't see any harm in going a little further, Ethel,' said Maurice. 'We've come in so much less time than Mr. Russell expected, that it will be the same thing in the end.'

'I don't think so. Papa said we might come as far as the cove, but he didn't say we might go any further.'

'But what has distance to do with the question?' said Maurice impatiently. 'It's the time we are out, not the distance we go, that he would think of.'

'Oh, don't be disagreeable, Ethel,' said Sybil, getting into a pet. 'Maurice, do make her be goodnatured. I'm sure papa wouldn't mind, Ethel, dear. Do let us stay out just a little longer.'

'Oh yes, we will,' decided Maurice. 'It will be all right, Ethel. Don't fuss, there's a good girl. Poor little Sib wants to catch a fish so much.'

And without waiting for any further remonstrance, he told Jack not to tack, as they were not ready to land yet.

'Oh dear!' sighed Ethel, 'I'm sure we ought to land.'

And she made a last attempt to induce Maurice to see the matter in her light, but in vain; he only laughed at her, and, joined by Sibbie, called her an 'old fidget,' 'marplot,' and other names, until, in despair, she gave up the point, and took refuge in a story-book, turning her back on the two others, with whom she was thoroughly vexed. Maurice and Sibbie pronounced her to be 'very cross;' and, soon getting tired of fishing and catching nothing, devoted their energies to teazing Ethel, by way of variety, ending by snatching her book away, telling her to talk to them instead of reading.

'I'll do anything you like, if you will only go back now and land,' she replied.

But no, Maurice wouldn't yield to her there; and, tossing the book back into her lap, he walked off to the other end of the boat, in a regular huff at her 'fid-fad nonsensical notions.' Sibbie trotted after him, muttering—

'How cross Ethel is! she spoils all our pleasure.'

'Yes. I say, Sib, let's play her a trick, and give her a good fright. It will serve her right for being such an old fidget.'

'Oh yes!' cried Sibbie, delighted at the idea of some fun. 'What shall we do?'

'Why, you shall hide yourself in that little cupboard in the cabin, and I'll throw something overboard, and make a great splash—these stones will do—and then she'll turn round, and, not seeing you, will think you've tumbled over. We'll only frighten her for a minute, you know. You must run out directly afterwards; and won't she be in a wax just!'

'Oh yes! that will be great fun,' laughed thoughtless Sibbie; 'and then we won't teaze the dear old thing any more afterwards, and we'll turn back, Maurice, to please her.'

'Very well. Now, then, creep away softly; no one's looking this way.'

Sybil crept into the little cabin as noiselessly as one of her own cats might have done. Next moment a loud splash roused Ethel's attention from her book, and made old Jack and his son start.

'What's that? Where's Sibbie, Maurice?' cried Ethel in an agony, missing her little sister from his side; and almost before she had finished speaking, Dick, looking round, and also missing her from where she had stood a moment before, sprang forward, calling out, 'She's overboard!' and before Maurice could stop him, he had plunged in in the direction of the splash. Almost simultaneously Sibbie ran out of her hiding-place, and Maurice, flinging off his jacket, jumped overboard after Dick. The two frightened children clung together, sobbing and crying, Ethel's relief at knowing Sybil was safe, almost lost in the horror of the two boys' danger. Old Jack said very little, but every bit of colour went out of his weather-beaten face as he brought the boat round without a moment's delay, lashed the helm, and, catching up a rope, ran to the side, ready to throw it to the boys directly they rose to the surface. Next moment both reappeared, swimming towards the boat, which by this time had drifted some little distance. Jack immediately threw the rope out to them, and Dick, catching it cleverly, was by this means hauled safely on board. The old sailor

was about to throw the rope out again to Maurice, but found the boat had drifted beyond the distance it would reach. Nothing remained, therefore, but to make a short tack to windward. Meanwhile Ethel, horror-stricken at seeing the boat drifting away from Maurice, with great presence of mind seized hold of a footstool made of cork, on which she had been sitting, and, exerting all her strength, threw it to the boy, who was rapidly becoming exhausted. With the help of this, he was able to support himself until Jack had again brought the boat back within reach, when, by a skilful cast of the rope, the old sailor succeeded in hauling the boy safely on board, to the inexpressible joy and thankfulness of Ethel and Sibbie, to whom the last few moments had seemed hours of agonizing suspense.

Dick, who was stronger and older than Maurice, appeared but little the worse for his wetting. Shaking the water from him like a Newfoundland dog, he bade his father 'look to the young gentleman,' and proceeded to work the boat, steering her for the cove for which they were bound, rightly thinking that the shore had now better be reached as soon as possible. Maurice lay for a moment or two somewhat exhausted with his late exertions, while the two girls, kneeling by his side, cried for joy at his safety. He soon rallied, however, and, looking up with a smile into their faces, told them not to make him still more wet with their tears, as he had had quite enough of the water. Jack made him swallow a small quantity of rum, some of which he happened to have in the boat; and then Maurice lost no time in taking off his wet clothes, emerging, after a few moments, from the little cabin dressed in an old rough suit belonging to Dick, in which he cut so strange a figure, that Ethel and Sybil,

having recovered somewhat from their fright, went off into shouts of laughter at the sight. Jack now took the helm, bidding his son swallow a drop of spirits to keep him from taking cold; but Dick, to whom a wetting was only second nature, laughed and shook his head, saying he wanted nothing of the kind; 'he was as right as a trivet, and the sun had well nigh dried his things already.' Sibbie ran up to him, putting both her little hands in his.

'Oh you good Dick, to jump into the sea after me! I'm so sorry I was so naughty as to hide. Oh! what should I have done, if you and Maurice had been drowned?'

'Ah, little missy, don't you play them tricks again. How my heart did thump, to be sure, when I heard the splash, and missed you!'

Maurice then came forward somewhat shyly, holding out his hand, and looking a little ashamed of himself. 'It was all my fault, Dick; I told her to hide to teaze Ethel, but I never dreamt you would be jumping overboard in such a hurry. I'm awfully sorry, and all that.'

'Thank you, Master Maurice, for jumping arter me as you did. It was right plucky in you, sir—it were; for if I couldn't have swam, I should have dragged you down, to a sartainty;' and Dick's voice grew thick as he spoke.

'That was just it; I wasn't sure that you could swim,' said Maurice, 'and wasn't I in an awful funk when I saw you jump over!' Then, going up to Ethel, he said in a low voice, 'Will you forgive me, Ethie? I *am* so sorry and ashamed. I was a perfect brute to frighten you so; you were right all along, and I was all wrong; I see that now.'

Ethel's forgiveness was not difficult to obtain. 'Don't

think of me,' she answered, 'I daresay I was crosser than I need have been; but Maurice, dear Maurice,' she added timidly, 'don't think I'm preaching, but—but you will thank God for saving you, won't you?'

'Do you think that wasn't my first thought, Ethel? Yes, indeed it was; and I asked Him to forgive me for my foolish, thoughtless conduct to you. Did you pray for me when I was in the water, Ethie?' he added shyly.

'Yes, for both of you,' she answered. 'Oh Maurice, it was so dreadful when the boat seemed going away from you, and you looked so white, and as if you couldn't keep up any longer!'

'And no more I could have kept up, if you hadn't thrown me that footstool so cleverly; I believe you saved my life, Ethie!'

'Nonsense! I'm glad I thought of it, though. Papa told me the other day it was made of cork shavings, and would float in the water.'

'I'm afraid Mr. Russell will never trust me out alone with you girls again,' said Maurice dolefully; 'he'll say I don't deserve to be trusted; but I'm sure I shall never forget to-day's lesson.'

'Dear old Maurice,' said Sibbie, clambering on to his knee, 'you shan't be scolded; it was just as much my fault. Oh dear, how nasty that cupboard did smell, to be sure! There were a lot of stale herrings in it, and I bumped my head so, crawling out of it!'

'There's the carriage party on the beach a-looking out for you,' said old Jack, who had his telescope to his eye; 'bring her head round, Dick—now then, run her in.'

'What! no papa?' cried Mrs. Russell, as the children

landed; 'you don't mean to say he trusted you on the water alone? Good gracious, Maurice, what an extraordinary figure you look! What have you been doing?'

'And what are you dressed up so funnily for?' cried all the others, in fits of laughter at Maurice's appearance. The children's story was soon told; but safe though they were before her eyes, Mrs. Russell shuddered to think of the risks they had undergone; and Maurice could see, although she refrained from saying much to him, that it would be some time before he would regain his character for trustworthiness in her eyes. The boy was grieved at this, for he dearly loved Mrs. Russell; but he knew he had done wrong, and was hardly surprised at her resenting his conduct to Ethel. He was, however, particularly anxious that Jack should not be blamed in the matter, and assured Mrs. Russell that the old man had acted entirely by his orders in giving them a longer sail; nevertheless, Mrs. Russell, and her husband also when informed of the matter, considered the old sailor decidedly to blame, as, knowing how anxious he had been on the children's account, he should have landed them at once, according to the orders given him. Neither Ethel nor Maurice could entirely recover their spirits throughout the whole day, and the fun of the pic-nic was rather damped in consequence, so that none of the party, with the exception of True and Violet, were particularly sorry when the time came for returning home. Miss Carey went back in the boat with Sybil and Maurice, Ethel taking her place in the carriage.

'I daresay the yachters haven't had half such an adventure,' said Olive, as they drove along.

'I hope not,' said Ethel, shuddering. 'Perhaps I was

more frightened than I needed to have been; but, oh, it was so dreadful to see the boys struggling to reach the boat, and to feel that it was drifting away from them! I shan't say much about it to Hilda when I write to-morrow.'

'No,' said her mother. 'I should not. You are all safe, thank God, and it will be time enough to tell them your adventures on their return.'

CHAPTER XX.

FIDELIO.

MR. RUSSELL looked very grave on hearing the events of the day, and not all his goodnature could prevent a reproachful 'Oh Maurice, what became of your promise?' from escaping from his lips.

'I know—it was very—very wrong of me,' said the boy, speaking fast and low, and looking very much ashamed of himself. 'I hardly know what to say to you, for I feel how miserably I have failed, and—and—how unfit I am to be trusted.'

'No, no,' cried Sybil, who was present, rushing up to her father; 'I was just as naughty, papa. Please don't scold Maurice. After all, he only meant it for a bit of fun, and you know boys will be boys.'

Neither her father nor Maurice could help smiling at the tone assumed for the occasion.

'I am not going to scold anybody, my dear little girl,' said Mr. Russell. 'Maurice knows he has disappointed me, and that is, I am sure, quite enough punishment for him. I will only say this to you both, Sibbie: never, even

in fun, try to hurt anybody's feelings, and for the future carefully avoid practical jokes; they are very seldom harmless amusements.'

'I'm sure I'll never venture on another as long as I live,' said Maurice earnestly; and holding out his hand with a smile to the boy, Mr. Russell said—

'Now, let us say no more about it. Thank God, nothing serious has happened.'

'We must do something, though, to forget it,' said Sibbie; 'something very nice, to take the taste of it out of our mouths, as nurse says when she gives me jam after my medicine—ugh!'

'Oh, you sly-boots!' said her father, laughing. 'What is it you want now?'

'To see the dogs and monkeys perform. Oh! it will be such fun; dear old Puppy, do let us go! They are coming to S—— on Thursday, just the day before Maurice goes home.'

'Very well,' agreed Mr. Russell, 'you shall go; only take care the monkeys don't recognise a kindred spirit in you, and carry you off to join the troupe.'

The performance was to take place in a rough kind of circus erected for the purpose, at the entrance of the town of S——. The front row of chairs was very little raised above the performing platform, and it was quite at one end of this row that seats had been taken for the Elworthy party, which consisted of Miss Carey, the four elder children, and Maurice.

Sybil was perfectly entranced by the cleverness of the animals; she laughed and applauded to such a degree, that an old fat gentleman who was sitting opposite, seemed

to find more amusement in watching the expression of her funny little face, than in looking at the antics of the dogs and monkeys. There was one little dog with whom the children all fell in love. He was a pretty little yellow rough terrier, and seemed really gifted with almost human intelligence. His master told a touching story of the manner in which he had come into his possession,—how he was travelling in Italy, and arriving late at night at a small wayside inn, had been welcomed by this little dog, who attached himself to him at first sight, refusing to leave his side the whole time he remained at the house;—how he (the owner) had left the hotel unobserved, as he thought, by the animal; and how, after walking for some miles, he had suddenly been joined by the little fellow, panting and almost worn out with fatigue, but showing, nevertheless, the most extravagant signs of delight at having found him.

'After this,' went on the man, 'I did not attempt to send him back, but, on arriving at the next village, I wrote a letter to the landlord telling him what had happened, and offering any amount in reason for the dog. But he was a good sort of a fellow for a foreigner, and he sent back word that he couldn't sell the dog, but that I might keep it, and welcome, since it evidently refused to have him for a master any longer. At first I was put to it for a name for the little fellow, but at last I pitched on Fidelio, the Italian for faithful, Fid being an easy abbreviation. Well, ladies and gentlemen, Fid and I have never been parted for a single day since; and all I can tell you is, that no human assistant could give me half the help he does in training these animals. If I want one of them to learn a trick, I first

teach it to Fid in no time, whatever it may be; then I bring up his pupil to him, and I say, "Now then, Fid, I'm obliged to go out, and I want so-and-so (whatever the creature may be called) to learn the trick I have just taught you." Fid barks—that means "yes;" and sure enough, when I come home, the pupil has had a better lesson than I could have given him!'

All this time the little yellow dog was sitting up as grave as a judge, now and then looking up into his master's face and nodding his head, as if to indorse what was being said, but giving a sharp little bark if he made the slightest mistake in any of his statements.

'Fid,' said his owner, turning to him, 'will you be kind enough to leave the room for a moment? I am going to hide this ball,' showing it to him, 'and you will have to find it.' Fid barked, and trotted out at the side, quite out of sight and hearing. 'Now then, ladies and gentlemen, where shall I hide the ball? Would any little lady like to put it in her pocket?'

'Oh let me, let me have it!' implored Sibbie, raising her voice so as to be heard above all those of the other children.

'Very well. Now then, hide it well, and try and look as if you knew nothing about it, for Fid has very sharp eyes, I can tell you.'

Sibbie poked the ball well into her pocket, and tried to look as unconcerned as possible when the dog reappeared.

'Now, Fid, my boy, find the ball.'

The little dog gave one sharp look round the platform, and another at the faces of the spectators, and then, without

a moment's hesitation, gave a jump right into the middle of Sybil's lap, and began to bark, putting his nose into her pocket, to try and get the ball out. The applause was deafening, and the fat old gentleman clapped his hands, and laughed till the water ran out of his eyes. Meanwhile Sibbie, in ecstasies of delight, was fondling and patting the clever little dog. At the first sound, however, of his master's voice, Fid broke loose, and jumping on to the platform again, crouched at his feet. After this he performed several other very clever tricks, and was then once more sent away by his master, who, when the little dog had gone, began as follows:—

'Ladies and gentlemen, I have sent Fid away, in order to tell you a short anecdote relating to his kindness of heart. When we were at Naples, some years ago, we were in the habit of meeting in our walks two wretched, half-starved little curs, who invariably insisted on following us wherever we went. This annoyed me, and I used to tell Fid so; but in his language he made me understand that my thoughts were very uncharitable, and that he meant to stand their champion. And for a whole week he used regularly to divide all his meals with them. Like us all, Fid has his peculiar fancies in food, and I used to give him all his favourite tit-bits, just to try him. But it was always the same; he never, however tempting the morsel, would eat more than half of it; with the remainder he trotted away to some quiet corner, where his wretched little friends were waiting for him. Well, we left Naples, and never saw the dogs again—that's some years ago; but to this day, if I venture to say a word against them, Fid gets into quite a passion. I'll call him in, and you shall see.'

Back came the little dog, recalled by his master, who walked slowly up and down the stage for a moment or two, without taking any notice of him. Then, turning to the audience, he said in a quiet voice, 'As you see, I am very fond of all animals, especially of dogs; but I once came across two, to whom I took a great dislike. They really were the nastiest little curs I have ever seen.'

Here Fid pricked up his ears, and evidently began to listen.

'They were of an ugly, dingy yellow, with ragged ears, and, oh, such dreadful little tails!'

Here Fid came in front of his master, and, looking up at him, began to bark fiercely.

'Why, Fid, what's the matter? Are you angry because I'm abusing your friends? But you know they *were* nasty little curs, not fit companions for such as you.'

Here Fid began a series of barks and growls, showing his teeth in an angry manner.

'Come, come, Fid,' soothingly, 'you shouldn't get out of temper with me because I like you to choose nice friends instead of bad ones. I can't help it, and I must say again that these dogs were *not* fit companions for you.'

Fid's anger increased every moment, and his barks were quite deafening. At last they ceased, and, as if to show his utter disgust at his master's words, he gave him one look, which spoke volumes, and deliberately turning his back on him, walked off slowly to the furthest corner of the stage, where he lay down, looking very sad and grave. The tears actually rolled down Sibbie's cheeks, and it was as much as Miss Carey could do to keep her

from jumping down on to the platform to comfort the little dog.

'What a shame! oh, what a shame!' she cried out, much to Olive's and Ethel's horror. 'You unkind man, to teaze him so! How can you? Oh! how I wish he was my little dog!'

'Hush! Sibbie, do be quiet,' whispered Olive, 'it will all be right in a minute; don't be so silly, listen to what's going on now.'

'Come here, Fid,' called out his master; but the dog did not move, nor take the slightest notice of the command.

'Very well, Fid, you needn't come if you don't like. I was only going to beg your pardon for having hurt your feelings; and also to tell you that I have changed my mind about your friends' (here Fid got up and came forward slowly). 'I don't think them horrid little curs any longer' (at this Fid quickened his pace, wagging his tail joyfully). 'No, indeed, I think them the dearest, nicest little dogs that ever lived.'

Oh to see Fid's unbounded delight now! He capered round his master, giving short, happy barks; then sitting up, began licking his hand, and finally managed to scramble into his arms, when he commenced kissing him after his own fashion, whining with joy the whole time. Every one warmly applauded the little creature's wonderful sagacity and affection; but no one was so touched as Sybil, who cried and laughed alternately, till Miss Carey was quite frightened at her state of excitement. Fid's master, wishing to please the child, gave the dog a small packet of sugar-plums, telling him to take it to the person

present who was fondest of animals. Fid did not lose much time in hesitation, but jumped up almost at once with his present on to Sibbie's lap, to her intense delight, as well as to that of the old fat gentleman, her opposite neighbour, who had taken a great fancy to the child. Several other tricks followed with the different members of the troupe, during which time Fid remained contented and happy with Sibbie, who was the object of envy to all the children present. At length the performance came to an end, and Sybil was forced to tear herself away from the little dog, which she did with the greatest reluctance.

'You seem very fond of animals,' said the master of the troupe, smiling at the parting kisses she was showering on Fid.

'Oh yes, I am! I wish I could live with them always, as you do; how happy you must be to have Fid always with you!'

'Well, I do love him almost like a child,' said the man, looking tenderly at the little dog. 'Its funny what a fancy he's taken to you, he seemed to read you off in a moment; but then he's more than half a Christian, is Fid! You could teach a dog or any animal any trick you liked, little missy. You'd be a rare good hand at it, I can see!'

The events of the day made a great impression on Sibbie, who could think and talk of nothing else for several days, until the children all declared she had much better join the troupe of dogs and monkeys, for they were quite sure she preferred them to her sisters, and would never be happy until she did. But a great happiness was in store for the little girl. One day, about a fortnight after the

visit to the circus, a basket was left at the rectory, directed as follows:—

'Miss Sybil Russell,
'*Elworthy Rectory.*
'To be opened immediately. This side up.'

'A parcel for Sibbie! Where is she? Oh, do come and open it quick, Sib!' called out Rhoda, running up to the nursery in a great state of excitement.

Her sister was at that moment very impatiently undergoing a course of what the nurse called 'being made clean;' but on hearing Rhoda's news, she at once whisked herself out of that functionary's hands, and with her frock only half fastened, and shoeless and sockless, rushed downstairs to inspect her parcel.

'Oh, there's something alive inside; what can it be!' she exclaimed on taking it up.

'Here's a knife, cut the string and see,' suggested Rhoda.

The basket was opened, and a card fell out bearing this inscription: 'From the fat old gentleman, to the funny little girl. The best photograph of Fidelio to be obtained.' And then jumped out a dear little yellow dog, a trifle larger, but in other respects the very fac-simile of never-to-be-forgotten Fid! It would be hopeless to attempt to describe Sibbie's delight. She was perfectly radiant with joy, which was only damped by knowing that she could not express her thanks, either in speaking or writing, to the dear, kind, darling old man, who had made her this wonderful present.

'I *must* call him Fid,' she said, 'he is so like him;'

and to her great surprise, the little dog answered perfectly to the name; and in his quickness with regard to learning tricks, and general sagacity, bid fair to be no unworthy follower of his clever namesake. For a long time after, Sybil lived in hopes of meeting the 'dear fat old gentleman' in her walks; but she never did, and at length she put him down in her own mind as a benevolent genie, who was allowed to take the form of an old man once every hundred years, in order to gratify the wishes of little girls; and for a very long time afterwards, she was particularly careful to pay every possible attention to all the fat old men who happened to come in her way.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARRY'S TUMBLE.

'KILLARNEY, *July* 18, 18—.

'MY DEAREST OLIVE,—We have left the dear little "Una" for a short time, and have been spending a week at this lovely place, enjoying ourselves immensely. We have been out on the lakes all day long, and, oh, they are so beautiful! The banks are green to the water's edge, with oak trees, yew, hazel, mountain ash, and arbutus, which is the most lovely shrub I ever saw—such a bright green. We had some difficulty in getting rooms, as the place is so crowded. The people, however, try to make up for all they don't give us, by a great many promises and big words. Irish people *are* so funny! The "Boots" at this hotel makes us laugh so much; he showed us our rooms when we first arrived, and said he would give us all kinds of "illigant things." Whereupon I asked him to turn my bed with the back to the light: the next moment his coat was off, and it was done. Then Agnes asked for a chest of drawers, there being no cupboard or wardrobe of any kind in the room: away went the Boots, coming back with them on his shoulders!

'On his next appearance he was laden with ferns, which he wanted to sell: "The rale Killarney fern, mi leddy!" Seeing it was impossible to get anything for nothing, we promised to take some roots; but we didn't think quite so much of the Boots after this. He amused us, however, very much about some friends of Agnes's—the O'Connors. She asked him how far it was to D—— House, where they lived.

'"Och, shure, I know it well," he replied, "it's just close here, and a nice family they be; but ye'll not see them now at all, at all, for they're all in gaol!"

'"In gaol?" said Agnes, looking quite scared at the idea; while Milly and I went into fits of laughter.

'"Shure and indeed that's just it," went on the Boots; "Mrs. O'Connor, and her husband, and Miss O'Connor, they're all in Tralee gaol."

'"But why—what have they done? Why are they in prison?"

'At this the Boots burst out laughing. "Ah! not in prison at all, at all! Mr. O'Connor, he's made governor of the gaol at Tralee, and they're all in residence there." So in this way the mystery was explained, and in a shorter time, too, than it usually takes to get to the root of the matter in this odd country. I found several letters from you waiting for me at the Post-office, and I hope Ethel got mine and Milly's on her birth-day. We should like to have been with her very much. Your letter about the dogs and monkeys has just come. What fun it must have been! Tell Sibbie we are longing to see her little Fid, and hope she will have taught it all kinds of tricks before we come home. How lucky she is, and what a dear old man that

must have been who sat opposite to her! We had a picnic yesterday on Ross Island, close to the ruins of the great O'Donoghue's castle. The boatmen told us all kinds of absurd stories and legends as we rowed along, and several were about the O'Donoghue, who is a great hero in these parts. The only one I can distinctly remember is, that once every seven years, very early in the morning, before the sun has driven away the mists from the lake, the O'Donoghue comes riding over it on a beautiful snow-white horse, fairies going before him strewing his path with flowers. When he arrives at his castle, everything is changed into what it used to be in olden times. Any one who is courageous enough to follow him over the lake, is spirited across dry-footed; and if he will ride on with him to the opposite mountains, where the O'Donoghue's treasures lie concealed, he receives a splendid present!

'Our boatmen are very disagreeable, noisy men, never quiet a moment, and I'm sure all they say can't be true. One of them told Cousin Herbert to-day that his brother-in-law was a member of Parliament, and that he had plenty of cousins in Belgium who were clergymen and doctors, and he might have been the same, only he had chosen to stay in "ould Ireland, and be a boatman!" He wound up by asking for a cap with a gold band, or some other "nice present!"

'I can only send you a short note to-day, as we are just going to start for Kenmare, and then on to Glengarriff, where we are to meet the yacht.—Your affectionate sister,

'HILDA.'

The drive from Killarney to Kenmare is one of the most beautiful in all Ireland, commanding continual views of the picturesque lakes, their islands, and the mountains that surround them. The character of the scenery is entirely changed from Kenmare to Glengarriff; it is fine, but very wild, presenting a great contrast to the soft green beauty of Killarney. On emerging from a long tunnel cut in the rock on the top of the hill whence begins the descent to Glengarriff, an extensive panoramic view is seen, extending beyond Bantry Bay, the blue waters of Glengarriff forming the centre of the picture, with a foreground rugged and picturesque in the extreme. The whole party were much struck by the squalid, wretched appearance of the little windowless mud huts they passed every now and then, whose inhabitants matched in looks, being one mass of dirt, rags, and tatters.

'Can nothing be done for these poor people?' asked Hilda.

'Nothing,' replied Mr. Grant, 'as long as the landowners neglect their property, and are absentees. The Irish feel themselves deserted, and have gradually drifted into this state of destitution and poverty, seemingly from an utter absence of energy and desire on their part to improve matters.'

'Look! look!' cried out Harry, as they approached Glengarriff, 'there are the masts of the dear old "Una." I'm so glad to see her again.'

'And so am I,' said Herbert. 'She's twice as comfortable as an Irish hotel, and six times as easy, in the very worst sea, as this jolting car.'

The next day was spent in exploring the beauties of

the lake, and on the following they sailed to Bantry Bay, and spent a week there, during which time Harry and the girls fished to their hearts' content, and had capital sport.

'It is some fun catching one's own soles for dinner,' Milly said; 'but I always thought before that they swam about in pairs, joined together, as you see them in the fishmongers' shops.'

There was a universal laugh at this idea.

'I never thought of it before,' said Agnes; 'but it certainly is odd that they should always fit so exactly. One sole by itself does look incomplete, and as if it had lost its other half.'

A day or two later, Milly went up to Hilda, who was sitting alone reading on deck, and said in a low voice, 'Hilda, did you see Aunt Mary's letter to Agnes this morning?'

'No; why?'

'Oh, nothing. I only wanted to know. I thought you generally saw them, that's all.'

'So I do, generally,' said Hilda, looking up from her book, and thinking Milly's manner rather odd; 'but there might have been something in this one which Agnes didn't want me to see.'

'Yes; and oh, Hilda, I'm so miserable! I think it's something about mamma or papa—something they don't like to tell me.'

'But why should you think so, Milly? You must have some reason I suppose?'

'Yes; just now, when I was fetching something from our cabin, I heard Agnes say (she was in the saloon

with Herbert, and the door was ajar)—I heard her say, "I wish we might tell Milly," and Herbert said something I didn't quite catch, but which sounded like "No, better not."'

'Depend upon it, there's nothing the matter,' said Hilda, putting her arm round her cousin's neck, 'or Cousin Herbert would look unhappy; and when he was up here just now, he seemed the same as usual; so don't make yourself miserable, dear. Shall I ask Agnes if anything's the matter?'

Before Milly could answer, a loud noise was heard, as of some one falling, and, running to the top of the companion-ladder, they saw Harry lying at the bottom of the stairs, down which he had tumbled, having caught his foot as he was coming down in a great hurry to show his mother some wonderful monster of the deep.

'Oh, Harry, are you hurt?' cried out Milly; and on hearing her voice, Agnes came running out of the saloon, followed by Herbert, to see what was the matter.

By this time Hilda had lifted him up, and he began calling out to his mother not to be frightened, as he wasn't much hurt.

'Not much; but are you hurt at all, my darling?' she asked, carrying him into the saloon.

'My foot is, that's all, and my head aches a little; it will be all right soon;' but in spite of his brave words, the tears stood in his eyes, and one or two rolled down his little cheeks.

'Oh!' he said, brushing them away angrily, 'the tumble's made my eyes water. Oh take care, mamma,' as Agnes was taking off his boot, 'it hurts so.'

'Yes, my darling, but it must come off. I'll be as gentle as possible; there, that's a brave boy — now for the sock.'

'No bones broken, happily,' said Herbert, examining it. 'Cover his foot up, mamma, and let him lie quiet here for a little while; we shall see then if it swells at all, but I hope it's only a slight strain. Show me where your head pains you, old boy; let me look if you've cut it at all. No, I don't see any mark. Ah, that's right, Hilda, bathe it for him with eau-de-cologne and water, and give Agnes some; she looks quite white with the fright.' As Harry's foot was somewhat swollen in the afternoon, and still pained him, Mr. Grant proposed setting sail at once for Kingstown, where they could get a doctor to look at it; and Agnes gladly agreed to the plan, for she felt very anxious about the little fellow. Accordingly, orders were given to get under weigh, and in a very short time the 'Una' was beating down the bay with a smart breeze, and was soon out of sight. On the following evening the anchor was dropped in Kingstown Basin, and early next morning Mr. Grant went off to Dublin for a doctor, taking Hilda and Milly with him to see the town.

Harry's accident had for the time made Milly forget her uncomfortable forebodings, but they had not altogether departed; and when she saw Herbert receive a letter in her aunt's handwriting at the Post-office in Dublin, read it, and then put it into his pocket in silence, she was more than ever persuaded that there was some mystery going on. Her brother soon saw that something was the matter with her, she was so unlike the usual bright little Milly; and on their way back to the railway station, where Dr. M——

was to meet them, he asked her why she was so silent and dull. Millicent's trouble was all poured out then, and her heart comforted by Herbert's assurances that there had been no bad news received from India.

'So don't be frightened, Milly, dear,' he wound up by saying. 'If there was anything wrong, I wouldn't keep it from you for a moment. There certainly is a little secret going on which I am not at liberty to tell you, but it is something very pleasant, not the reverse, by any means.' And with this Milly was made quite happy, though not a little curious; and during the following week she and Hilda had long talks and cogitations together as to what this wonderful secret could be.

Dr. M—— pronounced Harry's foot to be slightly strained, but thought it would be quite cured by using a lotion, and keeping it quiet for a week or two.

'A yacht is the very best place in the world for anything of this kind to happen in,' he said; 'there's no inducement to walk about, every one's glad enough to sit quiet,—at least I should be, I know.'

Mr. Grant smiled. 'I'm afraid Harry won't agree with you; he's quicksilver all over, and not fond of keeping quiet anywhere.'

'Ah, well, he can be carried up on deck, and he must get the sailors to spin him some yarns. Goodbye, my little man; no walking about, mind. So this is the staircase he tumbled down?' walking to the top of the companion-ladder. 'No wonder,' muttered the little, fat, podgy man, as he looked down, 'why, its a regular ladder. Goodness me, I wouldn't go down it for the world, or up either! Well, well, tastes differ,—to think that any one should live in a yacht from

choice! Good morning, Mr. Grant; goodbye, young ladies; thank you, my dear sir,' as Herbert jumped into the boat first to help him in. 'Ah, we must be careful here, there—that's it. Now then, where shall I put myself to balance the boat properly? That seat? All right. Well, I'm afraid I'm hardly active enough for much of this work.'

Herbert steered the boat to shore, saw the fussy little doctor safe on land, and then waited to bring back Harry's lotion.

Next day, the wind being favourable, it was settled to sail homewards, as the planned excursion through Wicklow was now impossible, on account of Harry's accident. The little fellow found the time hang heavy on his hands all the way back, being obliged to forego the various amusements he had invented for himself on board, all of which, more or less, required movement. His books were all read, and he felt no inclination to read them a second time; backgammon and dominoes had become tedious; his mother's stories were all about girls, and his stepfather was a bad hand at either telling or inventing one. At last, one day, when they were becalmed off Plymouth, he induced the captain to sit down by his side and spin him a yarn.

'What can I tell you about, Master Harry, that you'd care to hear?'

'Oh, lots of things,—storms and shipwrecks, or——'

'I know, I know,' interrupted the captain, tapping his forehead. 'You've heard me talk of my little Lily at home? Well, I'll tell you how I came by the little flower.'

'Isn't she your own child, then?' asked Milly.

'No, bless her heart; but I love her just as though she were. Well, Master Harry, shall I tell you about it? the story's got a storm in it.'

'Yes; go on, please.'

'It happened,' said the captain, 'about ten years ago, when I was living near Yarmouth, and had a fishing-smack. One afternoon in February I was out fishing, when a change came on in the weather, and I saw we were going to have a dirty night of it. The wind came up in sudden squalls, the sea got more and more ruffled, and every wave that rolled towards the shore had more foam on it than the last; added to which the sun had a nasty, lurid look about it, which I knew meant mischief. So says I to my mate, "I don't like the look of this, Jem. I shall make for shore before it gets worse." He laughed at me, but I had my way; and back we went. Before the sun went down, sure enough, it was blowing a regular hurricane. All the fishing-boats then made for shore as fast as they could, and down came all the men's wives, children, and relations to the beach, to see if they could help in hauling them up on the shingle. All that night it blew a fearful gale. The wind dropped early in the morning, but there was such a heavy mist over the sea that nothing could be seen. In a few hours the wind got up again, bad as ever, and drove away the mist; then we saw that a large vessel had run upon one of the most dangerous shoals, of which there are so many on that coast. She lay right upon her beam ends, not a sail set, and the sea dashing furiously over her hull. Looking through a telescope, we could make out the crew clinging to the wreck. It was hopeless to think of saving

the ship; but we couldn't help trying to rescue the poor creatures in her. So the lifeboat was manned, and off we set for the wreck, the poor women looking after us, crying and praying, but not one of them trying to keep us back—bless their brave hearts! The lifeboat, Master Harry, was faced with cork, which was covered with tarpaulin, so that it was very light, and leaped clean over the waves; but, nevertheless, it was such a fearful sea that it very often washed clean over her bows, and she was completely filled with water, which had to be instantly baled out, and very often we were all but washed overboard by these furious waves. However, on we went, notwithstanding all difficulties, still riding over the waves, till we were within twenty yards of the stranded ship, which was a merchant vessel, about 300 tons, very heavily laden, and sunk deep into the sandbank. Every wave that struck against her swept her deck from stem to stern, so that the wretched crew clung with the greatest difficulty to the bulwarks. We could hear their cries even through the roar of the tempest, and you can fancy how this urged us on. For some moments there seemed, however, as little hope for us as for them; for the nearer we got to the shoal, the more we filled with water, and once or twice we were completely buried underneath the huge waves. At last we brought the boat to within ten yards of the vessel, and lowering our small sail, managed to get under the lee of the wreck, where the water was smoother; and standing at the bow, I contrived to fling a small rope on board, which one of the sailors caught, tied it round his body, jumped into the sea, and was hauled on board the lifeboat perfectly insensible.'

'Oh, I'm so glad!' interrupted Milly. 'Then you did save one?'

'Don't be stupid, and interrupt,' cried Harry, who was listening with breathless interest. 'Go on, please, captain.'

'Yes, one was saved; but we saw many others on board, and among them was a woman, with a child in her arms. She was the captain's wife. Before more cord could be thrown on to the wreck, a fearful crash was heard, and down fell the main-mast, mizen-mast, and fore-mast. The next rope was caught by the captain, who was fixing it round his wife's body, when a wave swept them both into the sea. Dragging the line on board, I tied it round my own body, and jumping in, swam towards the poor woman, who rose again to the surface. She clung to me with a desperate energy, and we were both hauled into the boat. Two or three more were saved from the wreck. Then a terrific breaker struck her on the weather quarter; we heard a fearful crash; a second and third breaker followed, dashing the hull to pieces, and soon all that remained of her were some planks floating upon the waters.'

'How dreadful!' said Milly, heaving a deep sigh; 'all the rest were drowned, then?'

'Yes, we had only saved five besides the little baby; and now all we could do was to return with these to shore. The storm was still as wild as ever; but, fortunately, wind and tide were with us, and the danger going back was nothing to what it had been coming. All the good folks of the place were on the beach to receive us, with full hearts and willing hands; and many a humble home was ready to take in the poor fellows we had saved. I took the cap-

tain's wife and child to my own home, where my wife did all she could for the poor woman; but it was of no use, she never recovered from her exhaustion, and next morning she was dead. But the little one lived, and got on wonderfully, and my wife and I made up our minds we would never part with her of our own will. The seamen told us the captain's name was Benson, and one of them said he had heard the mother say the child was called Lily, just the right sort of name for a little white flower like her!'

'But hadn't the captain any relations?' asked Hilda.

'Yes; a rough kind of fellow came to our cottage one day about two years after, and said he was Lily's uncle; he had heard by accident that she had been saved from the wreck, and supposed he ought to take her home to live with him. We almost went down on our knees to him to let her be, for it would have broken our hearts, I think, to have lost her; and as the little maid would have only been very much in his way, he was glad enough to let her bide where she was. He was the only relation the captain had, he said, so that we needn't be frightened of losing the child; and since that day we've heard no more of him.'

'What is Lily like?' asked Milly; 'dark or fair?'

'Just like her name, as fair as a lily, with golden curls down to her waist.'

'Does she go to school?' asked Hilda.

'Yes, to a day-school at Cowes, where we live now. Ah! here comes the wind; now we shall have a chance of getting in. Forrard there; hoist the fore-sail!'

'Ay, ay, sir!'

The children thanked the captain very much for his story, and all expressed a wish to see little Lily when the yacht arrived at Cowes.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETURN HOME.

'THE last night in the dear little yacht,' sighed Millicent, as she walked up and down the deck before going to bed, on the evening after leaving Cowes. 'What a happy time we have had—nearly ten weeks! I am so glad you and Herbert are coming to stay at Elworthy. I am sure you will like Aunt Mary so much.'

'Yes, I'm sure I shall; and I want to see Mr. Russell and the children. I hope they'll think that you and Hilda look all the better for your trip. We must have another cruise next year if all's well, Milly.'

'Oh! I should like it so much. I sent mamma such a long letter to-day—oh dear!'

'What's the matter, Milly?'

'Nothing, only I want so to see mamma and papa again. Of course I'm very happy, but—I can't help thinking of them and wishing for them, and—oh dear! I wish there was no such place in the world as India!'

Mrs. Grant put her arm round her, and gave her a kiss; and Milly, comforted by speaking out her troubles, went on—

'I can't bear it when people tell me that I've grown, and

all that kind of thing, because I'm so afraid mamma won't know me again when she comes home. I wish I could have stayed just as I was when I left her, except that I'm glad I'm a little tamer. Just fancy if she met me by accident in the street and didn't know me! Oh Agnes, how horrid it would be! what should I do?'

'As if it would make the least difference a minute after,' laughed Agnes. 'You mustn't make yourself miserable, darling, about such nonsense; you forget that mamma has a new photograph of you every six months, so she's not likely not to know you when she sees you. Let me see—how old were you when you left India?'

'Eleven. I was twelve, you know, last January.'

'So you were; well, don't distress yourself, dear; I think I can promise you that mamma will know you again.'

'Oh yes, if she comes home next year, as they used to talk of doing. How delicious it would be! But I'm afraid there's no such luck as that for me.'

'Ah well, who knows? Go to bed and dream about it at all events.'

'Yes, go to bed,' chimed in Mr. Grant, hearing the last sentence through the open window of the cabin. 'I'm sure it's too damp for you to be on deck any longer.'

Sailing all night with a fair wind, they were able to reach S—— between four and five o'clock on the following day. Here they found Mr. Russell waiting with the carriage to take them on to Elworthy. Question after question was heaped upon him by the two girls as they drove along, until at last he declared he would answer no more, and that they must find out all the news for themselves.

'What brown gipsies they are,' he said, turning to Mrs.

Grant, 'and how they've grown! You all look better for the trip.'

'Yes, I think it has done us all good; but I, for one, am not sorry to be on land again. I'm not so devoted to the sea as the others are, and since Harry's accident I've been quite fidgety to get back.'

'His foot is much better, though, is it not?'

'Yes, I think so; but I should like it to be looked at again, and it must be quite well before I can send him back to school.'

'Oh! I see them all coming to meet us,' cried Milly, who was standing up in the carriage. 'True and Violet running along as fast as their little feet can carry them. Let's get out, Hilda, and go to them; may we, Uncle Frank?'

'Stop a moment,' said Mr. Russell to the coachman. 'Now then, you monkeys, jump out; I'll tell mamma you'll be there very soon. The children have been in such a state of excitement the last two or three days,' he continued after they had gone, 'I've been walked off my legs to and fro from the rectory to the coastguard station, to see if the yacht was coming in. Ah, here we are, and there's Mary at the door. I've brought back some of them, you see; Milly and Hilda have joined the children. Now, Master Harry, let me carry you in and put you on the sofa.'

There was a grand noise a few minutes later, when all the children came rushing in in the wildest state of excitement, each trying to talk faster and louder than the other.

'Why, the boys at school couldn't make much more

noise,' said Harry; which speech Sibbie took as a great compliment, and, darting up to him, she began asking a string of questions as to school life, going on to tell him about her own amusements, descanting on her cats and her wonderful Fid, to whom she had already taught a great many tricks.

Some days passed away, and in the excitement and pleasure of returning home, Milly almost forgot to think about the secret; until one morning it was recalled to her mind by Mrs. Russell saying to her after breakfast—

'Milly, dear, don't go up to the schoolroom with the others. I want you in the library.'

Then it flashed across her mind that her aunt was about to explain the mystery, and her little heart beat very fast as she followed her into the room, for she felt she was about to hear something important, although, from her aunt's smiling face, she knew it was something pleasant. Mrs. Russell shut the door, and put her hand on Milly's shoulder, saying, with a smile—

'I have some very good news for you, darling.'

'Oh, Aunt Mary, it must be about papa and mamma! Are they coming home sooner? Do tell me.'

'Not papa; but, Milly, only think—mamma may be here this week!'

'This week!' repeated Milly mechanically.

'Yes, this week, I hope and trust. Mamma has had a great deal of property left her by her godfather, and it is necessary for her to come home and see about it; and as papa can't leave till next year, she thought she would take the opportunity of coming over with some friends. When mamma wrote to me first, her plans were still uncertain,

and she didn't wish you to be told, in case of a disappointment; but this morning I received another letter from Aden, to say she was really on her way home, and thought I had better tell you at once.'

All this time, Milly, perfectly overcome with the magnitude of the surprise, stood looking at her aunt, hearing what was said, but feeling as if in a dream, unable to utter a single word, and not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

'Here's her letter; you shall read it. Oh, Milly, isn't it delightful to think we shall see her so soon, and that now they will never go back to India again?'

Then Milly utterly broke down, and, throwing herself on the ground, buried her face in her aunt's lap, sobbing and crying for very joy.

'Oh, Aunt Mary,' she said, when a little recovered, 'it *is* true, isn't it? I'm not dreaming? Mamma is *really* on her way home?'

'Yes, darling, really and truly; but I don't wonder at your scarcely being able to believe it. Come in with me now to the dining-room and get some water, and then I'll read you mamma's letter, and you'll see that it is all true.'

'Well,' said Agnes, smiling, as she met them at the door, 'wasn't I right, Milly? Mamma will hardly have forgotten you, I think!'

'Agnes! isn't it delicious? I *am* so happy! Oh dear! I'm so sorry for any one who's unhappy! I wish I could do something for them. Mamma coming now, and papa next year!—oh, it can't be true. Is Herbert in the dining-room? I *must* go to him! What does he say?'

Then there was the delight of telling the cousins. Miss Carey was in the secret; and for the rest of the day Milly wandered about in a state of restless delight, saying very little, but looking radiant, every now and then repeating to herself, 'Mamma's coming! mamma's coming!' thereby hoping to familiarize herself with the idea which at times still seemed too marvellously enchanting to be true. As for eating any dinner, it was a mere impossibility, and no one but Sibbie made any remark at her want of appetite. To go dinnerless was, however, an idea Sib's imagination refused to grasp. She stared at her cousin with eyes perfectly round with surprise, as plate after plate was refused, or taken away untouched, and at last gave vent to her feelings thus:—

'My word, Milly! (a favourite expression of Sybil's.) Why, you must be ill!' Upon which little True drew herself up, and shaking her head reprovingly, said, 'Sibbie, it's very rude to talk like that.'

At eight o'clock Millicent was so worn out, that Mrs. Russell persuaded her to go to bed; and peeping into her room an hour later, was rejoiced to find her in a sound sleep.

Next morning Milly woke at eight, perfectly refreshed, and was surprised to find her aunt standing by her side. 'Oh, Aunt Mary,' she said, starting up in bed, 'is it very late? I was so tired.'

'It is rather late, darling; but I am so glad you have had such a good night. I came to see how you were.'

'Quite well, thank you. I only woke once in the night; some door banged, I think, and I thought I heard noises out of doors; but it was only the wind, I suppose.'

'Did you think you heard a carriage?' asked Mrs. Russell, smiling.

'Yes, now I remember I did. What was it? Did any one want to see Uncle Frank?'

'No; but somebody wants to see little Milly, I think.'

'Who? Oh, Aunt Mary, is it—was it—not mamma come? Oh! do tell me, is——'

But Mrs. Russell turned away; and some one else stealing from behind the curtain, took her place, and a dear, well-remembered voice cried, 'My darling! my own little Milly! thank God for this;' and with a smothered cry of delight, Millicent found herself clasped in her mother's arms.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNCLOUDED JOY.

BUT little more remains to be said. Such overpowering joy as that felt by Millicent, such deep thankfulness as that which filled Mrs. Grant's heart, cannot be put into words. As her mother clasped her once more close to her heart, and remembered the agony and grief she had undergone in India eighteen months before, when parting with her child, she felt that God had indeed been good to her, and that the present moment more than compensated for all she had suffered. And as Milly, encircled by her arms, received and returned her mother's kisses, the past seemed bridged over, as it were, in a moment, and she felt as if she had never left her. This past, however, had been too happy a time, in spite of everything, for the little girl to wish to forget it. She had endeared herself to all those around her, and they were not less dear to her. Millicent's love for Herbert, her first friend in England, was as deep as ever; while of her uncle and aunt's kindness, she felt she could never say enough; and although perhaps Hilda and Ethel came first, the rest of the cousins each held their own place in her warm heart.

'They have all been so good to me, mamma!' she said, with eyes swimming in happy tears—'Herbert, Aunt Mary, Uncle Frank, and then Agnes and the girls—oh! you can't think how I love them all!' And this being so, the delight of the cousins can easily be imagined when, after some deliberation, Mrs. Grant decided on taking a house at S——, and they knew that for the present, at all events, they would not be separated.

And here, while all is sunshine with her, this portion of Millicent's life may be brought to a satisfactory close. Should any one wish to hear of her future life, or of that of her cousins, their wish may perhaps be gratified at some other time. Be that as it may, for the present we will leave her in a safe haven, the happiest little girl in the world.

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